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APRIL 1928

THE Illustrated BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

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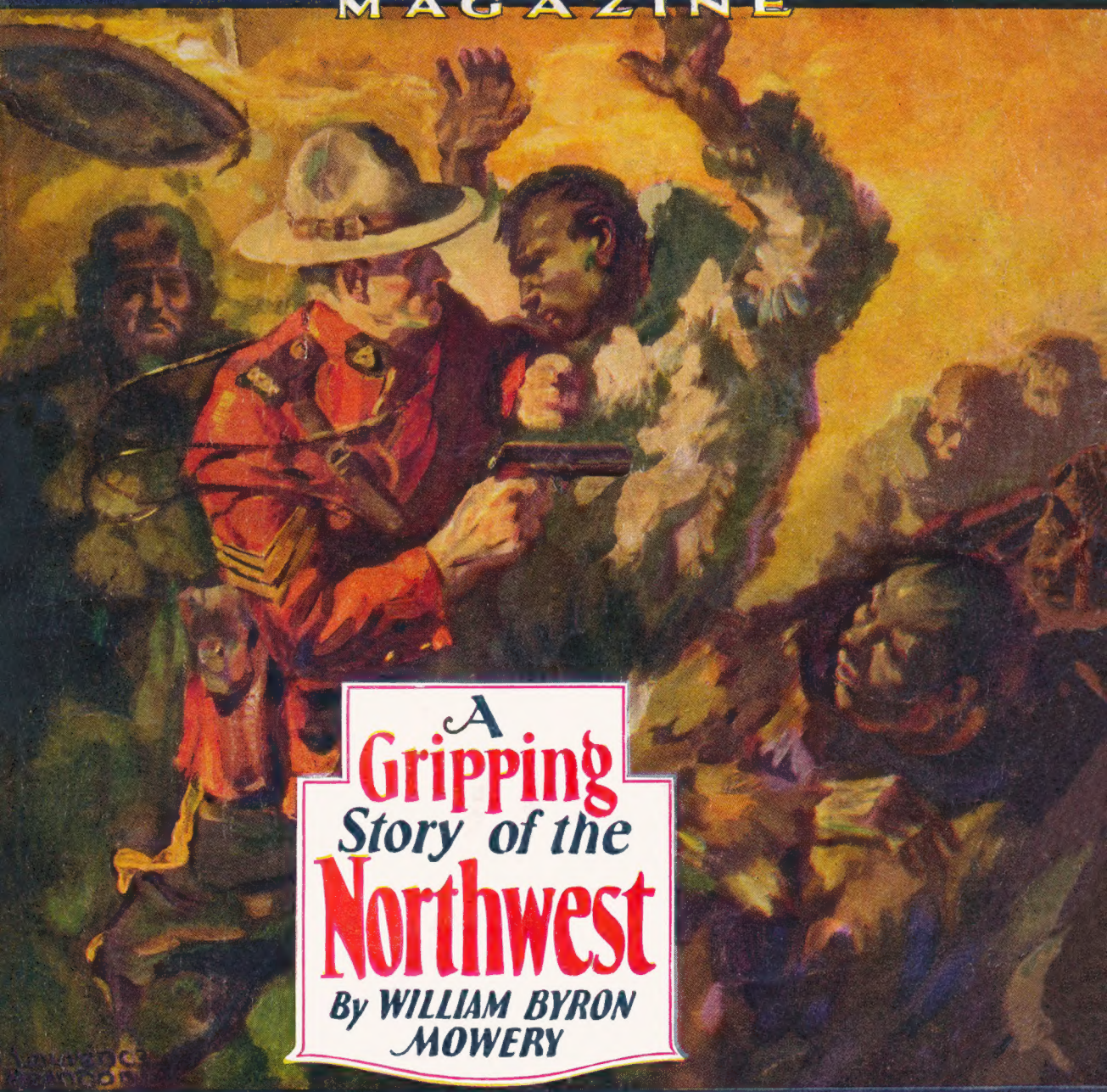


A Gripping Story of the Northwest

By WILLIAM BYRON MOWERY

$500 IN CASH PRIZES FOR REAL EXPERIENCES

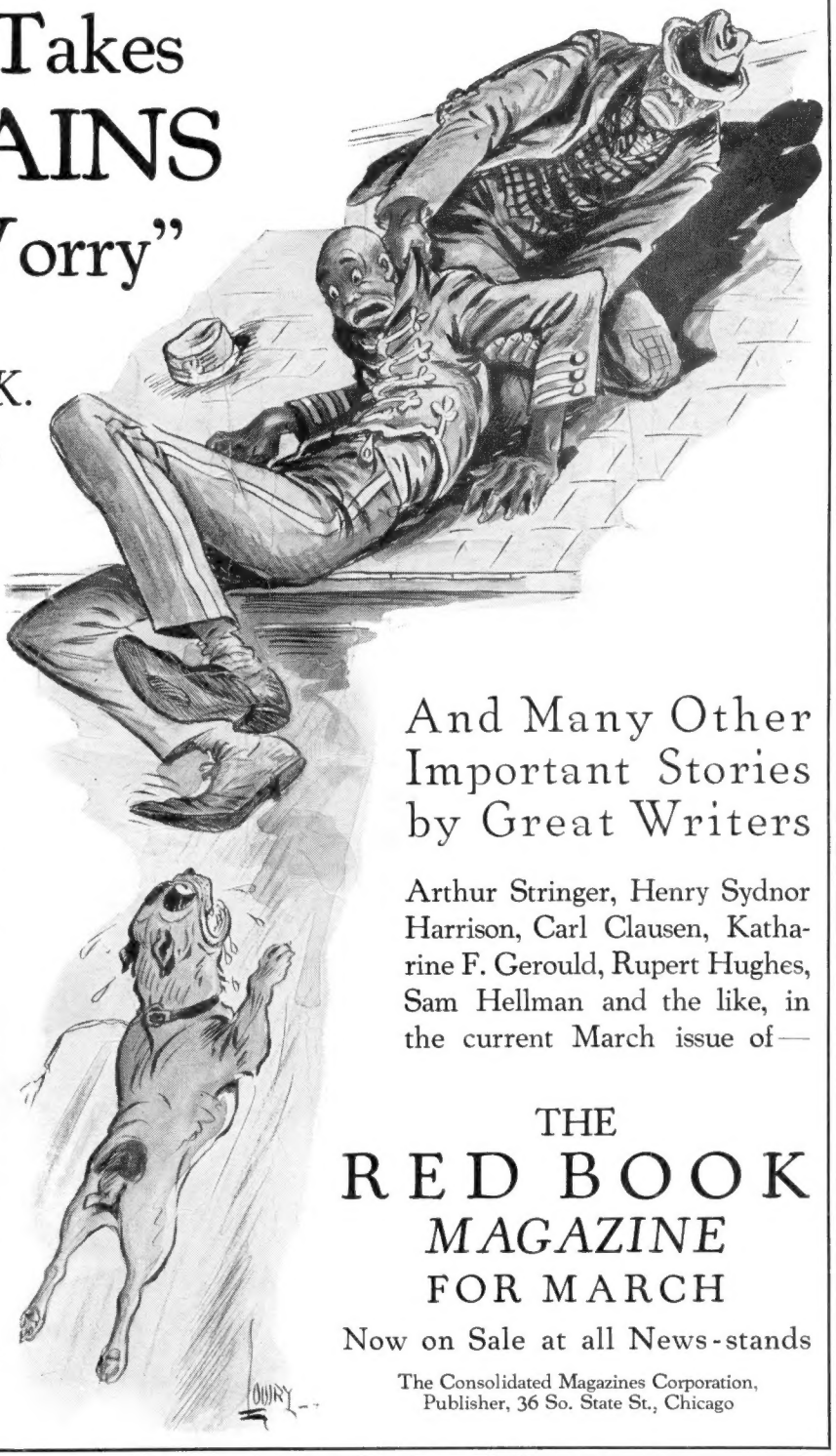
"TARZAN, Lord of the Jungle" By Edgar Rice Burroughs

H. Bedford-Jones, Clarence Herbert New, Harold Titus & others

"It Takes BRAINS to Worry"

By

Arthur K. Akers



"Circumstances threw Latham and Gladstone together on the roof of a garage.

"Fumbling in mind and pockets for something that might placate either his companion or the dog, Gladstone encountered a slight provision that he craftily had made during breakfast for his lunch.

"'You want couple of po'k chops?' he inquired propitiatingly.

"Latham grabbed once and swallowed twice. His animosity modified slightly. Gladstone wasn't so bad. And getting Lula carried its own punishment. A wife cramped a boy's style—"

Don't miss the rest of this joyous story in the current March issue.

And Many Other Important Stories by Great Writers

Arthur Stringer, Henry Sydnor Harrison, Carl Clausen, Katharine F. Gerould, Rupert Hughes, Sam Hellman and the like, in the current March issue of—

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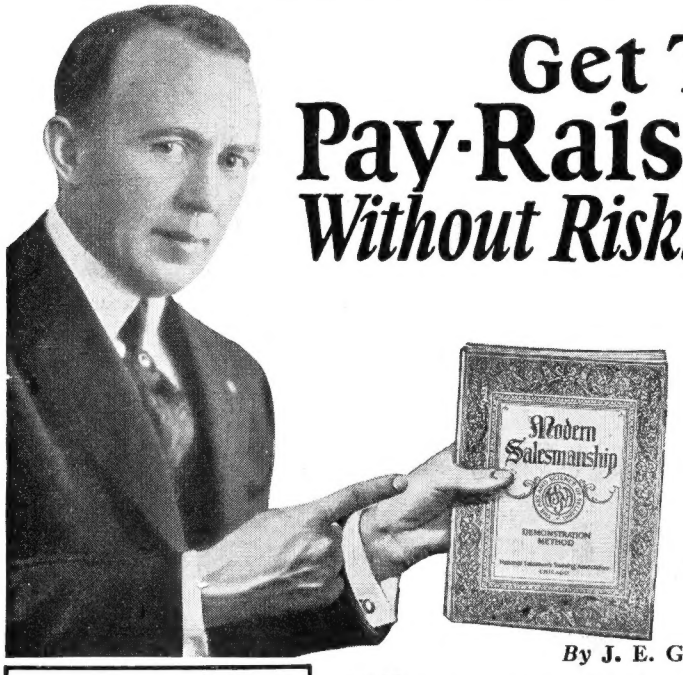

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See for yourself why it has brought such Amazing Success to these four men -and Thousands of Others

By **J. E. Greenslade**

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On this page are the pictures of four men who achieved success after seeing this plan. They had no advantages of special education or "pull"—but each one of them DID realize that the way to get things is to go after them. In their case "going after them" meant only the mailing of a simple coupon that started them on the road to bigger pay.

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THE BLUE BOOK

EDWIN BALMER, Editor
DONALD KENNICOTT, Associate Editor

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Cover Design: Painted by Laurence Herndon to illustrate "The Sergeant of Lone Cree."
Frontispiece: "Men Who Won the West—William F. Cody." Drawn by L. R. Gustavson.

Two Splendid Serials

Tarzan, Lord of the Jungle By Edgar Rice Burroughs 52
This, the most fascinating romance of our times, here reaches a series of tremendously exciting situations. (Illustrated by Frank Hoban.)

The Tough Nut By Harold Titus 102
Stirring events follow each other swiftly in this deeply interesting lumber-camp novel by the gifted author of "Timber" and "Spindrift." (Illustrated by William Molt.)

Two Novelettes You Will Remember

The Sergeant of Lone Cree By William Byron Mowery 7
The able naturalist and writing-man who gave us "Up the Keewateena Trail" and "The Loon Lake Patrol" is at his best in this story of the Far North. (Illustrated by William Molt.)

The Night Hawk By Bigelow Neal 164
We suspect that there is more fact than fiction in this impressive story by the author of "Captain Jack," for Mr. Neal has lived through such scenes as he describes. (Illustrated by Frank Hoban.)

Spirited Short Stories

The Lost Regiment By Warren Hastings Miller 29
You will find thrills aplenty in this stirring story of a Foreign Legion battalion betrayed in the Sahara. (Illustrated by Paul Lehman.)

The Men at the Mill By Bertram Atkey 40
The first of a delightful new series—the fantastic adventures of a young man given to a blithe moon-madness, told with fine humor and charm. (Illustrated by Frank Hoban.)

Hidden Rings By Charles V. Brereton 68
A lot of story is packed within brief compass in this highly dramatic tale by the author of "The One-man Dog."

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MAGAZINE

APRIL, 1928

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Five to One By Rollin Brown 70

The man who wrote "Forgotten Country" here gives us a notable story of Americans in Panama and of the new craze for dog-racing. (Illustrated by Frank Hoban.)

Free Lances in Diplomacy By Clarence Herbert New 79

To secret councils in Belgrade, to exciting events on the Sea of Marmora and to many other interesting places Mr. New leads you in this characteristic story. (Illustrated by Joseph Sabo.)

Sitting Bill By John Peere Miles 92

The surprising narrative of a house-painter who finds himself elected to the title rôle in a spectacular endurance contest. (Illustrated by Frank Hoban.)

The Wooing of Pewee By Robert Welles Ritchie 133

A joyous tale of the old West—of the coming of nitro-glycerine to supplant good black powder in the mines, and sundry other explosive happenings. (Illustrated by William Schmedtgen.)

A Speculation in Shipwrecks By Culpeper Zandtt 140

One of the best stories even Mr. Zandtt ever wrote—treasons, stratagems and spoils on the high seas. (Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson.)

The Queen of Hell By H. Bedford-Jones 154

A detective story of the most engrossing sort—swift action in Paris during the American Legion convention. (Illustrated by Paul Lehman.)

Five Prize Stories of Real Experience

One Chance in a Thousand By Floyd C. Manson 182

The story of a submarine accident which the participants barely survived to describe.

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My Tiger Hunt By M. L. Fox 188

A central American cougar battles a drove of wild hogs.

The Price of Suspicion By J. H. Overstreet 190

A business man finds himself in a false position and fights clear.

The Tale of a Monkey By Lloyd Logan 193

An amusing chronicle of misadventure with a too, too friendly pet.

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THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE is issued on the first of the month preceding its date (April issue out March 1st), and is for sale by all newsdealers after that time. In the event of failure to obtain copies at news-stands or on trains, a notification to the Publisher will be appreciated.

Advertising forms close on the third of second month preceding date of issue. Advertising rates on application.

WHEN MISTAKES COST $1000 APIECE

—*it pays to have advisors like these to turn to*

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We have in our files many letters like this one from Mr. F. H. Haviland, who is now connected with the Equitable Life Insurance Society at Chicago. At the time he wrote it he was a partner in a dry goods jobbing concern in Chicago:

"Early in the year we were warned by your reports that the market would drop during the summer and, having read them very carefully, we decided to clean out our stock and be ready to restock after the prices had fallen. Business continued to be unusually good during the spring, so that we were persuaded against our better judgment to place orders for $48,000 worth of laces from Ansonia, Connecticut. Before these goods arrived in Chicago in July, their market value had fallen $16,000, *the cost of disregarding your advice.*"

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Would you like to have such a corps of advisors if you could have them at a cost of a few cents a day? Naturally you would. Any business man would.

The man who gave us this thought is president of a successful corporation. In a bookcase in his office, almost at his elbow, are the volumes of the Institute Modern Business Course and Service.

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THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE
Vol. 46 APRIL 1928 No. 6

The Eye of the Beholder

AN American visitor in London, it is related, was driving leisurely along in a very British cab, when, as they met another hansom, he was perplexed to see his cabby take a piece of string from his pocket and shake it derisively at the passing driver—with astonishing results; for the other cabby promptly delivered a terrific broadside of the variegated bad language for which his tribe is notorious.

The tourist spoke to his driver. "Just what," he inquired, "is the big idea?"

"Well, sir," the man responded, "this 'ere Bill Snodgrass, that we just passed, 'e haint got no real sense o' 'umor, 'e haint—not none h'at h'all. Ye see, sir, Bill's gran'-father was *'anged!*"

Humor, in other words, depends wholly upon the point of view—whether we ourselves, or the pompous party across the street, slips upon the traditional banana-peel. Like beauty, humor is in the eye of the beholder, and what is high comedy to one man may be a dirge to another. It is for this reason, probably, that humor is the most difficult commodity for an editor to purvey—either to his own satisfaction, or to that of his readers.

There is no type of fiction, however, better worth printing—or reading. The writing-man who can offer us the blessed gift of laughter presents us with treasure rich indeed. Yet by an odd ironic paradox, humor is often the offspring of misery; and many a side-splitting story has been written by a man in acute distress from poverty, illness or grief—written, of course, as he seeks escape from his own unhappiness. Much of our typical American humor, indeed, came from the extreme hardships of frontier life; laughter was the only luxury the pioneers had. . . . .

In this issue of the magazine there are four stories notable for their humor: "The Wooing of Pewee," wherein Robert Welles Ritchie tells of the explosive events which accompanied the supplanting of black powder by dynamite in the California mines; "Sitting Bill," a jocund yarn dealing with a flagpole-painter very much in the air; "The Men at the Mill," the first of a delightful new series by Bertram Atkey, famous for his "Easy Street Experts" and "Captain Cormorant" stories; and the real experience, "The Tale of a Monkey," which will likewise add its quota to the gayety of nations.

Next month Mr. Atkey will contribute another humorously fantastic tale of midnight adventure, and there will be at least two other stories conspicuous for their fun. With them, too, will be another stirring installment of the inimitable Tarzan; a splendid Western novelette by E. S. Pladwell; a fine Saharan drama by Warren H. Miller; and many other specially attractive stories by such writers as H. Bedford-Jones, Clarence Herbert New, Lemuel De Bra, Culpeper Zandtt, Hugh Fullerton, Bigelow Neal and Arthur H. Carhart.

—The Editors.

Drawing by L. R. Gustavson

MEN WHO WON THE WEST

William F. Cody

IN July, 1876, just after the Battle of the Little Big Horn, the Fifth Cavalry struck a party of renegade Sioux and Cheyennes near War-bonnet Creek. Firing was about to begin when Yellow-hand, one of the Indian chieftains, shouted a challenge to a personal combat to William Cody, who was chief of scouts with the cavalry.

Cody—Buffalo Bill, as he was known to the whites, Pa-he-haska, to the Indians—promptly accepted. And so, in medieval fashion the two champions rode forward to battle between the lines of the two hostile forces. Both fired with their rifles as they drew near, and both were unhorsed. Afoot they ran toward one another, Yellow-hand striving to cleave Cody's skull with his deadly tomahawk, the white champion trusting to his bowie. It was quickly over, for Cody's splendid strength and skill evaded the tomahawk, sent the knife home, and added another conspicuous exploit to the extraordinary list which has made his name known all over the world.

The Sergeant of Lone Cree

By

WILLIAM BYRON MOWERY

A gallant venture and a desperate hazard are tellingly described in this fine novelette of the North Woods by the gifted author of "Red Heritage" and "Lost Cache."

Illustrated by William Molt

EIGHT hours after leaving the Police post half a hundred miles south, Sergeant Arnold Spaulding was unbuckling his snowshoes at the door of the Fullerton trading station.

He turned to his team of huskies, speaking to them as one might speak to comrades.

"We can't unhitch. We're stopping here just a minute. Better lie down, rest while you've got a chance. There'll be little enough resting on the job ahead of us."

As he stood his racquets against the split logs of the station, he glanced up at the somber heavens, reading the weather. The pall of leaden clouds had grown darker all that day. A north wind, savage and raw at thirty below, whined through the surrounding forest of Keewatin spruce, and sent snow-eddies dancing and swirling like wraiths across the clearing.

It was not yet three o'clock, but the early midwinter twilight was deepening into night. Down by the river bank, in the shadowy undergrowth of willow and deer-bush, snowshoe rabbits already were playing a fearful hide-and-seek with snowy owls that drifted through the purpling spruces overhead.

The six huskies, especially their great black leader, looked at Spaulding in quizzical surprise. To stop here only a brief while—that was astonishing! Night was coming on. They had done two days' travel in eight swift hours. Surely even their master, the tireless one, must be tired.

And there was another puzzle stranger still. Always before, when he visited this trading post, he had untoggled them and stayed several hours at least; and they had been petted and pampered by a black-haired girl and allowed to sleep in the warm kitchen—because they were *his* dogs.

A FEW yards from the door Spaulding noticed a *komatik* upended against the fur-press. Near the sled were several little mounds of snow where a team of huskies had burrowed down in the warm fluff and gone to sleep.

He saw at a glance that the *komatik* belonged to the Reverend Charles Norrys. A dozen times since leaving Lone Cree he had thought of Norrys. It was rare that Spaulding desired or needed company on a patrol, but he wanted it now. And of all men, he wanted Charles Norrys to be with him on what lay ahead. To meet the Anglican missionary here was a stroke of providential luck, like an answer to an unvoiced wish.

He stepped inside the squat, spreading fort. A goose-tallow candle burning on the counter cast flickering shadows over the shelves of trade goods, against the low rafters hung with wooden pails, upon the moose hides carpeting the floor.

At the huge pot-bellied stove in the middle of the room a solitary figure dozed in a chair. Stepping closer, Spaulding recognized Gabriel Perrault, a French-Cree

méti. With his wife and three *p'tites,* Perrault lived in a cabin at the clearing edge and helped Aurore watch after the post when Lem Fullerton was out trading among the Indians.

He was a gentle, stove-side soul—Gabriel Perrault; content to trap a little, to run his sturgeon nets in summer, to smoke and doze his life away. But like many a mild man, he had courage when need be; and he was protection for Aurore when bush-sneak 'breeds or insolent Cree sub-chiefs came in from the Strong Woods and hung around the lonely post, ogling her with hungry eyes.

Tossing his parka and gauntlets and heavy fur coat upon the counter, Spaulding stood there a long moment, thinking swiftly. Norrys would go along if asked, and Norrys would betray no secrets.

The candle-gleam was full on Spaulding's face, lighting up the cold gray eyes, the firm-set jaw, the purposive stern lines of his features. He was tall, hard of muscle, lean of build—with the efficient leanness of a wolf. His hair, roaching back in splendid, boyish waves, belied the sternness about him. His voice—gentle and sympathetic when he spoke to the tired huskies—belied it too. And more than once Charles Norrys, looking deep into those cold eyes, had guessed at that rare quality of self-sacrifice, of taking the burden of others upon his shoulders, that was bedrock in Spaulding's nature.

Well educated, in the prime of his late twenties, ruling his territory with a strong, masterly hand, Spaulding was officer material. Three years ago he had been sent to Lone Cree post as O. C. there. Before he came, the district, a huge block of wilderness reaching up almost to the Barren Grounds, had been a worry and a bugbear to the Police. Quarrels among the Indians, quarrels among the traders, quarrels between traders and Indians—a constant foment that more than once developed into feuds and bloodshed.

The Police had never yet established themselves firmly in the saddle there. Spaulding came to Lone Cree as a sort of bronco-buster. With tact and firmness he had broken the territory, subdued its unruly spirit, stamped out lawlessness. Save for a couple of instances it was peaceful as a Border district now, and any capable sergeant could take over the reins.

As reward of those three years, his commission was even then on its way to him; and at the spring break-up he was slated for transfer, to command a coveted post on the Athabasca.

The news had given Spaulding sheer surprise. He was proud of achieving his inspectorship so young, proud of commanding the Athabasca district. But then, treading on the heels of that news, came word from another source—a message that staggered him, and sent him out on this lone-handed patrol.

"Perrault!"

The *méti* awoke from his doze. At sight of the tall sergeant he sat up with a jerk.

"Where is all the world?" Spaulding asked, in bush French.

"Mam'selle Aurore is there," Perrault answered, indicating a door that led to the kitchen. "M'sieur le Reverend is asleep in that side room. He came in but a few hours ago from a long—"

"And Lem Fullerton, *le facteur,* he is out trading, *ne pas?*"

"*Oui,* M'sieur Sergeant. He is *en*

He turned to his team of huskies, speaking as one might to comrades: "We can't unhitch; we're stopping here just a minute. Better rest while you've got a chance"

derouine. Westward, to the Thunder Hills. Shall I perhaps unhitch your—"

"No! Feed them, if you will. Put moccasins on them too; I will strike jagged lake ice on the trip ahead. And that white chest marked with the *croix rouge*—fetch it in from my *komatik*. Very carefully, Perrault; it is precious as a hundred lives."

Picking up the candle, he stepped into the side room without knocking, and drew a chair close to the bunk. Norrys stirred and woke at the hand on his shoulder; and sat up hastily when he recognized his serious-faced visitor.

IN his three years' acquaintance with Norrys, Spaulding's esteem for the missionary had steadily deepened into abiding friendship. He himself had small use for religion as such; his religion was his work and just dealings with other people. For many of the missionaries he had met, he had a dislike bordering on contempt. But not for Norrys.

There was no taint of hypocrisy in Norrys' devout belief; no threadbare, hashed and rehashed platitudes in his wilderness sermons. To him, high-minded and scornful of quackery in God's work, it would have been abomination to buy "conversions" at five dollars a head, as some of his brethren did—to make a good showing with the home board.

There was a strain of profound mysticism in Norrys. He walked as one who saw God's hand in everything and witnessed daily miracles. And yet he was very human, very practical. His parish,

lying westward in the Thunder Hills country, was big as a small state; but by canoe in summer, by dog-team in winter, he covered it thoroughly, carrying his message directly to the Indian tepee, speaking to the Crees in their own tongue, fishing and hunting and laughing with them, and always practicing, himself, more than he preached to others.

Because Norrys so seldom presumed to give judgment on any moral question, Spaulding valued his judgment all the higher. Hours before, during his swift trip from Lone Cree to Fullerton Station, he had made up his mind, and had decided to carry his purpose through in lone secrecy if need be. But Norrys' company on part of the patrol would strengthen his hand; and Norrys' assent to the rest of his grim job would be a needed solace.

"What kind of a patrol this time, Spaulding?" Norrys asked, after their greeting. "Or don't you need official reasons to come visiting up this way?"

IN his purposeful fashion Spaulding went straight to the point.

"We've got an outbreak of smallpox east of here, Norrys. Couple of cases occurred last fall. I clamped down a hard-and-fast quarantine. Restricted the disease to one small district. Sent Dick Fullerton and two constables over there to look after things. But it broke out, and it's spreading west."

Norrys was instantly wide awake, listening intently to the dread news.

"It's confluent smallpox—worst kind," Spaulding continued. "Bad enough among whites, but with dark-skinned races it's a deadly scourge. It'll wipe out every camp it hits. If it ever gets west of here into the Thunder Hills, it'll sweep clear to McMurray. The only way to head it off is wholesale vaccination. That's the patrol I'm on—or part of it."

Norrys glanced up quickly.

"Part of it?" he echoed. "If that's only part of it, for heaven's sake what is the rest?"

Spaulding chose his words carefully.

"I'll tell you the rest when and if I have to. It's my hope I may never have to."

Norrys looked at him sharply, in astonishment. A dozen questions shot into his mind. But something in Spaulding's tone warned him not to pry. If Spaulding was silent, there were good reasons for that silence.

He thought for a few moments, wondering what Spaulding wanted of him.

"Why didn't Doc Morrisey come along?" he asked.

"Didn't want him. He can't stand weather like this. But you and I can, I guess. I'd like for you to go with me."

"If I can be of any help, of course!"

"You can. We'll start right away. I'd like to see Aurore a few minutes while you're getting ready. Perrault will help you hitch up. We don't dare waste time. The days are short; we'll have to travel partly by night. I brought an electric lantern. These storms will slow us down. Ordinarily it is a ten-day trip, where we're going; but it'll take us a month or better now."

He drew an imaginary map on the coverlet and went on tersely, pointing with his finger.

"You don't know the country east. I'll explain. Here's Fullerton post, where we are now. Over there, two hundred and sixty miles east of us, is Lac aux Mouffettes, where Corporal Fullerton and the two constables are stationed. This big oval-shaped region in between is a huge tamarack swamp, a tangle of lakes and muskeg and crisscross rivers. It's good trapping ground—mink, beaver, rats and marten. That's why this east country is thick dotted with Cree and Chippewyan camps. That's why the disease will spread like wildfire.

"The Indians camp along the north shore in the heavy woods, and tail their fur-paths out into the tamarack swamp. We'll follow the north shore, search out the bands and vaccinate them. The scourge hasn't made much headway yet, hasn't reached any of the big camps. It's my hope to beat it. We'll be racing against time—"

Norrys reached for his clothes as Spaulding got up. He was thoroughly aware that hours were precious, thoroughly alive to the peril threatening the Indian bands along the muskeg shore.

It seemed to him that he and Spaulding would not be racing time, but *Death.*

AT the door leading into the kitchen, Spaulding knocked. Getting no answer, he turned the knob.

Because of the savage wind kicking over the building and the birch wood crackling cheerily in the cooking stove, Aurore Fullerton did not even then hear him. For several moments she was entirely unaware of his presence. He stood in the doorway,

Spaulding and Norrys forced themselves to the utmost; they were racing death.

one hand still on the knob, loath to disturb the picture he saw.

Quiet, happy, peaceful—it seemed another world from the lowering gloom outside and the gloom of his own thoughts.

At a table Aurore was cutting out cookies—quaint figures of bird and fish and animal—for the three *p'tites* of Gabriel Perrault. She was wearing a simple gingham dress; her arms bare, a dab of flour on her cheek, her dark-brown hair flung carelessly back over her shoulders and loosely gathered by a ribbon.

To the left of the kitchen a door led into her father's room. To the right the door into her own bedroom stood ajar. Spaulding could see the crude dresser which Perrault had made for her, the colored magazine prints she had tacked on the bleak log walls, the filmy curtains of the tiny window, her bunk spread with white blankets, her gown hanging on a peg, some treasures of this and that dear to a girlish heart; and dearest of all, his own picture on a shelf beside some books, as though she wanted him to keep watch over her when she was asleep.

She was humming, while she worked, some soft *chanson* of love, all unconscious that Spaulding himself was listening. He felt as though he were violating something sacred by his silence.

"Dear!"

She turned, saw him. A second of wide-eyed astonishment; a swift-mounting, rosy flush of joy. Then she came to him, frankly, unabashed, with a little cry of gladness at the mere sight of him. Spaulding slipped his arm around her slender waist and held her close as she stood on tiptoe to kiss him.

"You're nearly frozen, darling!" she was saying a little later. "Your lips and your cheeks,"—she put her small hands to his face,—"they're as cold as ice."

Though he smiled at her solicitude, Spaulding's thoughts were of something else. He was looking down into her eyes. They were steady and innocent eyes, dark-brown, dark-lashed, limpid as sunlit pools —an index to her sensitive, deep-feeling nature. In them Spaulding had often read her unreserved happiness in her love for him; but he knew that profound tragedy could sit in them as well.

"But where's Dick?" she asked, glancing past him. "Didn't he come with you, Arnold?"

DICK FULLERTON was her brother, and Spaulding's closest friend on earth. Three years ago he had left his father's trading station and joined the Mounted; and under Spaulding's brotherly guidance

had swiftly risen to a corporalcy, with splendid prospects on ahead.

In more than physical resemblance Dick and Aurore were much alike; both of them keenly alive, vigorous of body, sensitive, idealistic. Both of them—brother and younger sister—looked up to Spaulding, leaned upon him and brought him their troubles, because he was older and far more experienced than they. Dick was self-educated, but on his meager salary he had sent Aurore to the Outside school for a couple of seasons. It was indeed through Dick that Spaulding had come to know Aurore.

His relationship with brother and sister was a source of profound satisfaction to Spaulding. To it he had pinned his happiness. But like all deep emotion, this relationship was fraught with potentialities of a tragedy. Where there is no love, there can be no pain; and the deeper the love, the more crushing is a disaster to it. Until this morning Spaulding had never thought it possible that anything could rise up, threatening to sweep his passionate love for Aurore, his companionship with Dick Fullerton, into a bottomless abyss.

Abstractedly he fingered a strand of her hair as he answered her question.

"Dick's over east at Lac aux Mouffettes. But he'll probably visit you before long. I sent him relief; he's been on hard duty there a couple of months. We're having some trouble—"

He explained briefly about the smallpox scourge and his intention to vaccinate the Cree bands along the north edge of the muskeg. As he finished, he saw a fear creep into her eyes, and guessed what she was thinking.

"You mustn't worry about your dad," he reassured her. "He went *west* to the Thunder Hills country. The scourge is *east*. But about yourself,"—he glanced at a scar on her left arm, up near the shoulder,—"how long ago has that been, Aurore?"

"Six—six or seven years. One time Doc Morrisey came past and insisted that Dad and I and Dick should be—"

"Too long ago to be safe," Spaulding commented. "Immunity gets weaker each year. A virulent type of the disease might attack you. I'll vaccinate you again. Can I get a bite to eat before I leave?"

"But you're not leaving? Not tonight! You mustn't. You can make better time if you rest—"

Spaulding could picture a fireside evening there, talking to her and Norrys. Usually his hours with her were stolen visits when he swung aside from some patrol. And it was very seldom that her father, Lem Fullerton, was not there, surly and suspicious—spying upon whatever they said or did.

But Spaulding also pictured the red death creeping unseen along the north shore, stalking the Cree encampments like an invisible dragon, and only himself and Norrys, with hypo needles, to fight it. Hours were lives.

He shook his head. "I don't dare stay. A man can't listen to his own likes in such a matter as this."

Aurore understood, and did not urge him. While she hurried about, getting him a hot, substantial meal, he leaned against the door-frame, watching her, thinking.

SPAULDING, for all his companionship to Dick and Aurore, was an outsider to the Fullerton household, and had an outsider's clear vision about several things.

It had always been a marvel to him that the two young folk could be children of Lem Fullerton. Filial love blinded them, especially Aurore, to anything evil in their father: to his incredible selfishness, to his shadowy dealings with the Indians, to the grasping, mercenary motives back of all he did. But Spaulding was far from blind. He knew Lem Fullerton for what he was; and he knew those shadowy dealings down to the last detail. The trader was furtive and crafty as a trap-line carcajou; but Spaulding was a little craftier, a little wiser. The trader had spies and stool-pigeons among the Indians; but Spaulding had better spies, better scouts.

What he knew he kept strictly to himself. He felt it a sinful thing to shatter a child's ideal. The truth would have been humiliation and a bitter tragedy to Dick and Aurore. For their sake he kept silent and covered up several nefarious deals which he never would have overlooked in another trader.

It was wrong to hush them up. But it was wrong to disclose them, too. Caught between two fires, he could see no clear-cut, *real right* thing to do. It was characteristic of him to be silent, and take upon himself the wrong of suppressing the truth, and so spare Dick and Aurore.

Lem Fullerton was not grateful for this tolerance. On the contrary, he harbored a festering grudge against the man who had

found him out. Between them—both strong men in their own ways—there was a tacit enmity. It jigged across Spaulding's romance like an ugly, sustained discord across a harmony. Fullerton did not want Aurore to marry. He had even tried to keep her from going Outside to school. The same sordid motive held in both cases: he wanted her there at the trading-post. Stripped of all niceties, he wanted a woman to cook for him, to keep house, to nurse him. Aurore's happiness, her desire to be married, counted for less than nothing with him.

In a dozen different ways he had striven at first to poison her mind against Spaulding. Lies about Spaulding having *amours* with half-breed girls, about his embezzling treaty money, about him conniving with "permit" smugglers. That attempt failed dismally; her love was too loyal and trusting.

In the last half-year he had switched to other tactics, more successful. By playing upon Aurore's sympathy for a "lonely old man," by taking advantage of her affection for him, by constantly reminding her of her obligations to a father, he had got her to put off her marriage indefinitely.

Spaulding acquiesced in that. Though the seasons had seemed long and the evenings without one another lonely, he and Aurore were sure of each other and so content to wait. The news of the inspectorship and transfer, however, meant a decision one way or other. He was going to take Dick along with him as sergeant. He had built up a vision of life there on the Athabasca—a whitewashed cabin for Aurore and himself, his zestful work, companionship with Dick.

Aurore would go with him if he *urged* her. For days he had debated with himself, debated fiercely, whether or not to ask her.

That question was taken out of his hands now by the news he had heard that morning. It seemed that the Providence to which Charles Norrys pinned devout faith had found a fearful solution to the question.

So Spaulding did not mention his inspectorship to Aurore as she sat across the table from him and poured him tea. Perrault brought in the white chest. Norrys came in for a moment to say he was ready; and tactfully went out into the trading-room to wait.

Using the hypo method to make a certain job of it, Spaulding vaccinated her—and kissed the dimple in her elbow to atone for the pain of the needle. He spoke lightly of the hard patrol ahead, searching out the Cree encampments.

But in their last moments, as he kissed her good-by and looked down into her clear, unsuspecting eyes, he half-closed his own lest she might read his grim secret.

FROM the trading station on the spruce-buried river, Spaulding and Norrys struck eastward into Strong Woods, keeping close to the edge of the huge tamarack muskeg. They forced themselves to the utmost exertions. Literally they were racing death; and literally that white chest marked with a red cross was life or death to scores of helpless Indians. They might meet the scourge at the very first camp they came to. They might meet it far east and stamp it out before it worked much havoc. They hoped at least to save a majority of the Indian bands and build a barrier athwart its path westward.

Each morning when the earliest gray of dawn was filtering down through the spruces, they crept out of their sleeping pouches, stiff and cramped; and pushed on, traveling until midnight, with only a brief halt at noon to rest and boil tea. It was the Chippewyan Moon-of-Frozen-Winds, a moon of brutal storm and savage cold. Blizzard after blizzard—short, intense woolly-whippers—howled down from the Barren Grounds. But through storm and still cold they pushed on, driving themselves and their dogs to the limit of endurance.

There was no trail to guide them, no moon or stars or sun to show direction. Magnetic masses underlying the tamarack hills played havoc with their luminous compasses. Spaulding had to feel their route eastward, but he traveled with the surety of a born bush-loper. He walked ahead, beating down a path with his snowshoes, his huskies following, then Norrys and the second dog-team. At times they came to lakes swept bare of snow, and speeded across them. At times they fought their way through deer-bush and dense juniper and floundering snowbanks, where they made but half a mile an hour.

Norrys could not stand the grueling battle. He had to give in at last and ride his *komatik* wherever the going permitted. It was beyond his understanding how Spaulding, for all his powerful body, could break trail, day after day, eighteen hours at a

stretch. He walked like a machine, indomitable, silent. He seemed to be tireless and sleepless. Twice in the dead of night, when *mal de racquette* pain awakened Norrys, he saw Spaulding over the camp-fire, a blanket around his shoulders, thinking.

He knew that some powerful motive was driving the Sergeant beyond a man's ordinary strength, that something more than the burden of this patrol, the race against death, hung on his comrade's shoulders. But he asked no questions; Spaulding's silence and his rock-hard face forbade them. He knew that if and when the need of it arose, Spaulding would tell him, somewhere eastward along that muskeg shore.

THEY broke out one noon upon the edge of a sizable lake; and looking across to a bay on the far side, they saw a cluster of Indian tepees—nearly two score of them—with several small log cabins close by. Smoke was spiraling from all the lodges, and whipping away down wind.

"Bois Fort Crees," Spaulding remarked, halting a few minutes to let the teams rest. "Apah-Stamik's band. Some *méti* families living there too—in those cabins. We're lucky. I knew this camp was close around here, but we might have hunted days to find it. That smoke means we've won our race so far."

He stepped to his *komatik*, took a heavy black automatic from his pack, clipped a loaded magazine into it and thrust the weapon into his jacket pocket.

The strange action startled Norrys.

"Spaulding! Why under heavens—that gun—"

"Before the next hour's up, you'll find out *why*," Spaulding answered briefly.

"You mean—trouble with them?"

Spaulding merely nodded, as though the trouble he anticipated at this Indian camp were a trivial thing on *that* patrol.

They started across the lake. Savage gusts of wind, sweeping across the open ice, swirled the *komatiks* crazily, tangling traces, cruelly punishing the worn huskies. Another storm was brewing. The clouds scudded low overhead, ominous and threatening—a symbol of their reception.

As they approached, a pack of half-wolf Indian "crackies" came tearing out of the camp. Spaulding held them off with his long whip. In a clamor of dogs barking, Indians shouting, the patrol swept into the middle of the encampment.

Norrys looked around him curiously—at customs different from those in his own "parish." The tepees were pitched close together at the very edge of the lake. A big *kozgee*, or council wigwam, stood in the center like a hub to a wheel. Deep-trodden paths led from lodge to lodge, and radiated south toward the muskeg trapping-grounds. The *méti* cabins nestled under the first trees a few rods north. Just beyond them a twelve-foot windbreak, a wall of interlaced spruce saplings, extended a bowshot east and west to protect the lodges from the Frozen Winds.

Fervently Norrys gave thanks that the red scourge had not yet struck this camp. Men and women and children—they counted more than a hundred and fifty souls. The men were of the tall, muscular, Strong Woods type of Cree. The younger women, clad in soft deer-skins trimmed with fur, were very pretty. Several of the *métisse* girls standing back from the eager circle were strikingly beautiful—so winsome and adorable in their furs and quilled garments and saucy broad sash-belts that they seemed reincarnations of Alouette, the song-sweetheart of the old fur *voyageurs*.

"Quiet down, you!" said Spaulding's cold voice. "I'll crook my finger, and blow your heart out, if anyone makes a move."

In their dark hair and eyes, their graceful bodies, their shyness, Norrys saw a girlhood even such as Aurore Fullerton's.

Down the huge snowdrifts behind the windbreak the children had worn a dozen toboggan slides; and under the heavy spruces had built miniature snow lodges and forts. And even as he watched, a little warrior of five years came whooping out of the woods, bringing home in triumph a snowshoe rabbit miraculously caught in one of his snares.

As Spaulding had prophesied, the men were in camp waiting for the Moon-of-Hoar-Frost, when the still cold would allow them to run their fur-paths again. Watching them as they beat back their dogs and grinned a welcome to their white visitors, Norrys thought that surely Spaulding's prediction of trouble must be wrong.

In the council chamber some minutes later he was disillusioned.

BY Spaulding's request he carried the white chest into the *kozgee* and opened it, ready. On their trip that chest had been their chiefest concern. It was a small, metal-bound casket lined with double caribou hide and padded with wolverine fur. Four granite stones, carefully heated at each camp-fire, had kept the compartments warm and protected the precious vials of lymph from freezing.

A dozen of the more important Indians came filing in to hear what strange mission had brought the white men to their camp. They sat cross-legged on deerskins, their swarthy faces up-turned, their eyes sparkling in the gleam of a rude fish-oil lamp.

In front of them crouched their leader, Apah-Stamik, the Bull Mink. He was a middle-aged chief of exceptionally big body, powerfully muscled, his eyes small and beady, his face a gargoyle. Norrys had heard many tales about the Bull Mink, and none of them good. He was the one chief who had not yet acknowledged Police authority. For stubborn, perverse brutality he had a reputation clear to the Thunder Hills. He ruled his band as he ruled his own lodge—with an iron hand. He had four or five wives, all prematurely old and broken.

In his belt he carried a symbol of his brutality—a "squaw-club." It was the first time Norrys had ever seen a man carry one openly and brazenly, for the Police had largely succeeded in stamping out the atrocious practice of wife-beating. From a few stray hints, Norrys had gathered

that Apah-Stamik was defiant in other ways to the Police, and that his defiance was egged on by Lem Fullerton for certain reasons of his own.

Almost before he knew it, Norrys was witnessing a long-deferred clash between the Sergeant, lone-handed, and the Chief, backed by a dozen warriors with forty more just outside the lodge.

Facing the Indians, Spaulding stood in the middle of the big lodge, erect, his stern face unsmiling. The light from the fish-oil lamp glowed resplendent on the vivid scarlet of his jacket and enhanced the golden-yellow stripes of his trousers. There was some intangible air of command about him, a power, a towering mastery, which Norrys had never noticed before. He dominated the *kozgee*. He drew the eyes of all of them, and they listened for him to speak.

In crisp, perfect Cree he explained about the smallpox. About its occurrence, eastward, during the Moon-of-Hardening-Ice. About it breaking out and spreading westward. About its deadliness. About the necessity of vaccinating every man, woman and smallest papoose in mother's hood.

As he pictured the red death stalking into the camp, creeping from lodge to lodge, reaching a long hand in through the flap-front of the tepees, the dozen warriors paled and squirmed in their seats. But to the powerful harangue Apah-Stamik listened totally unmoved. A faint grin of derisive disbelief grew upon his lips as he listened.

He was plainly unaware of the scientific facts, and stubborn in his blindness, and above all personally hostile to the yellow-striped Sergeant. His big bulk, his iron authority, loomed squarely athwart Spaulding's purpose. Of the fearful consequences to the women, children, hunters of his band, he was entirely ignorant.

With half an eye Norrys saw how things were shaping. The warriors were eager enough to be vaccinated, but they were under their chief's heavy-handed rule and necessarily would take their cue from him. The issue sharpened down to a struggle between Spaulding and Apah-Stamik.

WHEN Spaulding finished, the Chief blinked his eyes slowly.

"I have heard much papoose-jabbering about this red death. I am not afraid of it. For a score of Great Moons I have pitched my tepees here in these forests. It has never yet visited my camp. Therefore it will not come."

That kind of superstitious reasoning was very familiar to Norrys. But anger and exasperation welled up in him as he heard the guttural sentences. The Chief was deliberately balking Spaulding, taking a perverse delight in showing up the Yellow-stripe.

Spaulding did not answer. He stooped to neither anger nor persuasive pleading. He was colder and more impassive than Apah-Stamik himself.

"Moreover," the Chief went on, "this vaccination is evil medicine. Once a hunter of my band, a famous moose-tracker, allowed himself to be pricked in the arm by the magic needle. The next moon when he went hunting, a wounded moose trampled and gored and killed him. Is that not proof it is evil medicine?"

Still Spaulding said nothing. He crossed his arms and waited in stony silence. The warriors seemed to be veering toward their Chief's viewpoint. His crazy reasoning was logic to them.

"Moreover, the black-robed prayer-man warned us against this medicine-magic—"

"That's a lie!" Norrys burst out in faltering Cree. "I have talked a score of times with Father Donnelly, and I know what he tells you."

Apah-Stamik showed no chagrin at Norrys nailing his lie. He kept his eyes on Spaulding. He was beating around for some excuse to refuse. His next question staggered Norrys.

"If we allow you to prick us with the magic needle, how much are you willing to pay us?"

There was an interested stir among the dozen Indians at the mention of possible dollars. Norrys started and nearly swore at the preposterous question. Why didn't Spaulding say something, argue, plead? Did he consider it futile to bandy words? Was he accepting defeat?

The silence lengthened. Apah-Stamik broke it finally with an emphatic gesture and still more emphatic words.

"Then if we get paid nothing, I shall not allow you to go about among my men and squaws and papooses with your needle. It is not in the treaty. I am chief here. I say *go*."

An Indian snickered at the spectacle of their Chief defying the Yellow-stripe. The others joined in, chuckling throatily.

In sudden alarm Norrys glanced at

Spaulding. The latter's silence amazed and puzzled him. It was not like Spaulding to let helpless women and children suffer from a chief's perverseness. But what could a lone man do?

"Spaulding!" he burst out. "For God's sake, argue with him, promise him money, anything—"

Spaulding turned his head.

"Argue? There's only one argument this bull-headed ignoramus will listen to. If he were alone, I'd let him rot. But here's a camp of men and women and kids. They're children—the lot of them. They have to be treated as such. But this friend of ours, the Bull Mink—"

He took a sudden step forward, reached down, grasped Apah-Stamik by the collar and yanked him roughly to his feet. The Chief struggled furiously to break free. He crashed a powerful fist-blow to the Sergeant's face. But Spaulding held him with one hand. And the next instant, before the stunned Indians could recover and grab their weapons, a black automatic prodded the Chief under the fifth rib, and Spaulding's cold voice stood out above the ominous, swelling noise.

"Quiet down, you! I can crook my trigger-finger and blow your heart out. That's what I'll do—if anybody makes a move. Order your men to come up one by one. Order your whole camp in here, one by one. I'll count heads. If any are missing, you'll pay for it. Norrys, hand me that needle a moment. Then get busy with it yourself. This camp is going to be vaccinated!"

NEEDLE in one hand and revolver in the other, Spaulding vaccinated the Bull Mink first of all. The very effrontery of his act overawed the rest of the warriors. They admired courage and fearless purpose in anyone. Moreover, they realized that the Yellow-stripe, at the first hostile move, would kill their Chief before they could kill him.

Spaulding took no chances. He pulled Apah-Stamik aside and stood covering him, alert and tensed—prodding orders out of the Chief with the muzzle of his automatic.

All the next hour Norrys worked feverishly with the needle. When the little rabbit-hunter, last of a long line, fled wailing from the *kozgee* and a trustworthy *méti* announced that the whole camp had been vaccinated, Spaulding thrust his revolver into his pocket, coolly turned his back on Apah-Stamik, picked up the white chest and strode out to the *komatiks*.

ON eastward, fighting their way through a frozen wilderness of tamarack and heavy spruce and snow-buried muskeg, they searched out Cree and Chippewyan bands, visiting five encampments in quick succession.

Norrys had to keep stern hold of himself. The patrol was drawing heavily on his physical reserve and still more on his moral strength. In his weakened body condition, the lonely white solitude, the blind swirling storms that struck them, the weird play of the aurora overhead during their night marches, began to prey upon him.

Strange, dreamlike fantasies flitted across his brain. Strangest of them all, the invisible enemy that he and Spaulding were racing—at first a mere abstraction in his mind—gradually became a shadowy apparition he could envision somewhere on ahead; and then, in ever clearer outline, like a huge figure emerging from a cloud of frost-fog, the apparition took on tangible, incarnate form and became a vivid enemy of flesh and blood.

He realized that the fantasy was born of a tired body and overwrought mind, so it did not trouble him greatly. Besides, with every camp they whipped past, the possibility grew that this patrol of Spaulding's might win a complete, crashing victory over their enemy, however huge and sinister that specter might be.

In spite of a merciless pace the dogs were holding out well. Satan, the great black leader of the Police huskies, was a team in himself. The savage, stormy weather which slowed them down seemed a foe, but in reality it was a blessed friend. For, as Spaulding pointed out, it tended to keep the Indians in their lodges and prevent intercourse between the bands. Already the patrol had built up an impassable barrier between the disease and the Thunder Hills country and checked the menace of it spreading westward. Already they had visited three-fourths of the Indian encampments and were within striking distance of Lac aux Mouffettes, with only three encampments on ahead.

Sometimes, when he had to give in and ride the *komatik*, Norrys wondered why Spaulding had asked him to come along on this patrol. Except for that hour at Apah-Stamik's camp, he had been of no help. In fact he had been a hindrance. He believed

that Spaulding had brought him along to have company—some one to talk to. But why, then, did Spaulding not talk? There were days when he hardly spoke a dozen sentences.

Another thing Norrys keenly wondered at. Whatever happened now, Spaulding had achieved a substantial success already. But that did not lift the unknown, unguessable burden from his shoulders. All he had done seemed of small moment to him. Sometimes at night when Norrys awakened, he still saw Spaulding sitting over the campfire, lost in thought, a dead pipe in his teeth.

A hundred times the question was on Norrys' lips: "Spaulding, what is troubling you? Tell me; maybe I can help." But always he remembered what Spaulding had said back at the Fullerton trading station: "I'll tell you if and when I have to. It's my hope I may never have to." So the question went unasked, and he trudged along, trying to make himself as little a hindrance as possible.

THEY stopped one noon on the bank of a large river coming in from the northwest.

"Rivière Epinette," Spaulding remarked. "Two miles below us, at the muskeg edge, it branches into a dozen forks. The Epinette Crees are camped somewhere in that delta. We'll cut south and find them."

They dropped down the frozen stream to where it debouched through its many channels into the tamarack muskeg. They should have come across fresh snowshoe or *komatik* tracks at the forks; but they saw none. Searching systematically, one channel after another, it was late afternoon before they found the camp of the Epinette Crees.

They stood on a little mud volcano and looked down at it—a cluster of twelve tepees in a drogue of black tamarack. A pack of wolfish "crackies" roaming unrestrained through the camp, howled dismally when they winded the strange dogs. But no one came out; no human figure appeared. The dim old paths radiating on south were nearly blown shut. They had not been used in many days. The toboggan chutes down the mudhill slope were abandoned; the tiny sleds half-buried in drift at the bottom.

From two of the twelve tepees a thin spiral of smoke stood up. The others were lifeless and deserted. At the east and west approaches to the camp two tamarack saplings had been lopped of their branches. From their gaunt tops—conspicuous warning to any visitor—fluttered a red rag.

For a long minute Spaulding and Norrys gazed down at the sinister red sign, at the stricken camp on that bleak wilderness shore. Slowly they realized that here at last, after their long, valiant race, they had met their grim enemy.

IT was Spaulding who broke the silence. "Stay here, Norrys. I'm going down. But you—don't go any closer."

He lifted a small medicine kit from his *komatik* and strode down the slope. Norrys watched him going from lodge to lodge. In the two from which smoke still spiraled he stayed many minutes. Presently he came back up the hill again, stopping a dozen feet away from Norrys.

"Five of them are left," he said, his voice constrained and harsh. "A couple of men, a woman, a girl and a small tot. There's nothing we can do. They've food. I left them medicine. The men are up and about again, able to take care of the rest."

"But those other two camps—between here and Aux Mouffettes?"

"Wiped out. Complete."

Norrys cleared his throat. He saw that Spaulding, for all the latter's self-control, was hard-hit; and he attempted consolation.

"We did our human best, Spaulding. Rather, *you* did; I was just a drag. Think of all the camps back west that you visited and saved from—from this. Think of the barrier you built up—"

His words went past Spaulding unheard. Spaulding was thinking of something other than personal satisfaction.

"Our patrol's ended here, Norrys," he interrupted. "We'll have to split up. You're going one direction and I another. Take the white chest and put it on your sled. Leave me my sleeping bag, guns and some grub. I don't want to come close or touch anything."

Norrys swallowed his tumultuous questions, and obeyed. Instinctively he knew that Spaulding would presently break his silence and talk. Surely the *if* and *when* of his necessity had come.

"You'd best go back the way we came," Spaulding continued, when the transfer had been made. "It's an easy trip to the last camp. They'll give you a guide, fresh dogs. On your way back to the trading-post, try

The next morning Spaulding discovered tracks not more than two days old.

to get those three or four hunters who were out when we visited their camps. If any of our vaccinations didn't take, get them too."

"But what," Norrys asked hesitantly, "—what shall I tell Dick and Aurore—where you are—what you're doing?"

"Tell them I went northwest. Into the Strong Woods. After a half-breed trader that violated quarantine over near Aux Mouffettes and spread this scourge."

Norrys fairly jumped.

"Lord above! You mean—that's how it broke out? I can't believe it!"

Spaulding motioned him to sit down on the *komatik*. He himself sat on his own sled, facing Norrys.

"You can't believe it? *I can.* I foresaw it. Two months ago, when I clamped down that quarantine, forbade traveling, trading, I thought of all that wealth of furs dammed up in these camps. A hundred and fifty thousand dollars in peltry goes out of this district every year. You saw it at the camps we visited. You saw how crazy the Indians are to trade. They always are. A few skins—and they break for the nearest post with them.

"I thought, two months ago, how a *komatik* loaded with tobacco and 'permit' could make the rounds, reap a harvest, skim off the cream of that peltry—marten, mink, dark fox. With other traders staying away, a man could easy enough make thirty thousand dollars in a month's time. It was a temptation, a golden lure—"

Norrys nodded.

"The Indians kept to their camps," Spaulding spoke on. "I had the treaty-money whip-hand over them. But these irresponsible free-traders—trading was the one thing I was afraid of. If there'd been no trading, there'd been no outbreak. I tried to guard against it. Dick and the constables had their hands full; they couldn't watch. I sent my best scout, John Ear-to-the-Ground, a foot-loose young Cree. He's been eyes and ears for me before in bush work. Reliable, tight-lipped, incredibly loyal and efficient.

"I told him to hover around those camps near Aux Mouffettes and see if any trading was going on. That same day I came up to the Fullerton Station, he got back. Without sled, dogs, anything. He'd run the last hundred miles on snowshoes. He fell in my cabin that morning while he was reporting.

"On his trip he shadowed a couple of camps. Discovered a trader had broken the law—was trading. Heading west to

these other bands, spreading death. Keeping in the background himself, using messengers, stool-pigeons, to do the actual trading—so he wouldn't be found out. He was clever at the game, mighty clever. But John Ear-to-the-Ground tracked him down and discovered who he was—"

Norrys suddenly started, as though Spaulding had shot at him. He gasped and half-rose to his feet. All Spaulding's silence on that patrol, his somber hours of lonely thought, the heavy secret he had kept locked within himself—through Norrys' brain the whole truth volted in a stunning revelation, and his eyes were suddenly opened.

Spaulding noticed his agitation. Slowly he nodded. "Yes. Lem Fullerton."

FOR some time afterward Norrys did not look at Spaulding nor speak. His emotions at first were weltering chaos. Gradually one shouldered all the others aside and rose dominant. He had long been a stranger to anger against a fellow-mortal, but it swayed him now. A towering, furied anger that stirred him to the depths of his being, that made him want to lay prayer-book aside and take up a rifle.

In front of his eyes, down the slope, were the stark evidences of Lem Fullerton's handiwork: The lifeless tepees, the dim footpaths untrodden, the abandoned toboggan chutes of the children—the blocks of ice they had harnessed dogs to and played at sledding.

And to his ears came a low, recurrent sound from one of the lodges. It was like the moaning of wind through the spruce tops—not violent nor vehement; but the low, primitive cry of unassuagable grief. And he knew it was an Indian woman mourning for a husband or a child.

For the sake of gain, a sled-load of peltry—these three stricken camps, this desolation, this suffering and death—for the sake of gain! A willful and premeditated act. Lem Fullerton had known very well the consequences of his trip. He was not ignorant, like Apah-Stamik. He had been expressly warned against trading to the east. He had broken the law willfully, knowingly. He would not otherwise have traded secretly and built up that lie of going westward to the Thunder Hills.

It was an act so selfish, so cruel and heartless, that it seemed incredible to Norrys. But there beneath his eyes lay the evidence to prove it true.

Presently he heard Spaulding speaking again. The terse tone recalled him.

"Maybe you understand why I didn't tell you till now. There was a chance we could win our race—undo his work. If we had, I meant to cover it up and give him a solemn warning. *But this can't be covered up.*"

NORRYS was looking past him at the desolate lodges down in the drogue of black tamarack.

No, there was a crime that could not be covered up.

"There's a couple of things," Spaulding spoke on, "that I've got to tell you. No one but you must ever know and there is something you can do for me. When you get back, you can explain to Aurore—and to Dick if he's come—that I went northwest after a half-breed trader. They'll want to know where I am. Dick'll want to know how this scourge broke out. Fix up some story that hangs together. Anything—just so they never guess the truth. I don't know when I'll get back—"

"You're going after Fullerton? You know where he is?"

"Yes. He's got a cache up northwest of Rivière Epinette headwaters. A secret station he uses for underhanded work. Ear-to-the-Ground and I found it once. He's probably made for there. Either got suspicious, or else had all the peltry he could sled. He'll store it there—till he can safely fetch it out. From that cache he'll go on west to the Thunder Hills and come home from that direction."

Norrys looked at Spaulding intently. He knew Spaulding already had made up his mind; he could read *that* in the purposive hard lines of his comrade's face. His question came hesitantly.

"What are you—you going to do—when you take him?"

"What would you do?"

Norrys stared down at the camp as he strove to answer.

"For this—and those other two camps—he'll get two or three years' imprisonment, his trading license revoked, perhaps a fine. God, that isn't justice! It's a travesty on righteous punishment."

"Yes, a travesty on what he deserves. But there's another thing—a bigger thing. Where would the real punishment fall?"

The question startled Norrys. It ripped aside a veil for him. It opened up a dark vista he had not yet glimpsed; and he

shrank back aghast from what he saw there. In his anger he had thought only of retribution—of a stern and fitting justice to a dastardly crime. He saw now that he had been short of sight, that the situation was not simply a matter of meting out justice; that Spaulding, in his lonely hours of thinking, had seen far deeper than he into that tangled problem.

"What will it mean to Dick?" Spaulding continued. "He's getting his three-stripes this spring. His commission is a certainty in a few years. He'll be one of the youngest inspectors in the Force, and nothing to stop him from climbing on up. We've been friends, but I never pushed or favored him. He's earned his promotion; his prospects are only what's due him. But when this affair comes to light, do you think the Board will promote him? They're a thousand miles away; they don't dare take chances on 'like father like son.' Dick's career will end, sudden.

"But that's a material thing, Norrys. I'm thinking of something not so easy to see but a hundred times worse. Dick and Aurore—they're hardly more than children. You know how they idealize. You know how sensitive they are. The real punishment will be theirs, because they feel keenly. Especially Aurore. The shame and disgrace would hound them the rest of their lives. Shame can't touch a man like *him*, but it would break them."

Norrys could only nod. He saw the profound truth in what Spaulding said. His acquaintance with Dick was slight, but with Aurore he had been cordial friends. He would have loved her if she had not belonged so utterly to Spaulding. He knew her intimately. He knew that because of her childhood at the isolated trading-post her father was far more an ideal to her than to most girls. As striking proof of that, she had put off her marriage with Spaulding indefinitely. Her ideal was mistaken, but none the less precious to her.

When she heard about her father's infamy, about the three death-smitten camps, it would be a worse crash for her than Dick's ruined hopes in the Mounted. Norrys could see her dark-lashed eyes opening wide in stunned, bewildered tragedy.

"Let punishment be to the guilty, not to the innocent," Spaulding broke into his thoughts. "And let it fit the crime. All along on this patrol I had hopes of getting to Aux Mouffettes before any damage was done. But we lost. Down there, when I was going from lodge to lodge looking inside of them, I said: 'Lem Fullerton's got to pay.'

"A fellow in the Mounted is not supposed to have any feelings of his own. But a person who does only his perfunctory duty is a machine. If he's human, there's times when he's got to be a law to himself and take things into his own hands. That's what I'm going to do. I've got to shield Dick and Aurore. I've got to make Fullerton pay. There's only one way to do both. I'm going to follow Lem Fullerton northwest—track him down. *He's never coming home.*"

THE silence lengthened into minutes. Norrys looked away, out over the tops of the black tamarack.

He knew that Spaulding was waiting for his answer. He half-guessed that more than a month ago, at the Fullerton trading station, Spaulding had had this very moment in mind in asking him to go along on the patrol. Whatever the answer might be, it would not sway Spaulding one way or other; nothing could stop him now. But it would be a solace, on the grim job ahead, to know that a fellow-mortal had backed him up with moral approval.

He did not try to side-step or evade Spaulding's unspoken question. But he did want to see the whole thing clearly before giving his judgment.

If there had been malice or personal anger or selfish reason in Spaulding's intention, the answer would be simple. Norrys could not assent to it. But the Sergeant was taking a heavy burden on his shoulders purely for the sake of others. Instead of letting Dick and Aurore bear the brunt of the punishment, he was assuming it himself.

"Have you thought, Spaulding," he asked presently, "of all the consequences—to yourself? Wont it shadow your friendship with Dick? Do you think you can ever marry Aurore—remembering that?"

"I don't know. Maybe I could make myself forget. Maybe the secret wouldn't weigh heavy, after a time. I don't know."

He could see that Spaulding did realize those consequences more fully than he himself, and yet did not hang back from a job that had to be done.

"There's another thing, Spaulding. You, lone-handed, going up against a man who's bush-wise and a good rifle-shot himself—aren't you taking chances?"

"I wouldn't want a dead-certain drop. I don't intend to shoot from ambush."

Norrys did not press the point. For one reason, he knew that Spaulding was efficient with a rifle. For another, he devoutly believed that just Providence would not allow the Sergeant to be killed and Lem Fullerton to come home instead.

"It's a terrible thing to do, Spaulding," he said finally, solemnly. "But it's a more terrible thing *not* to do it. My judgment, like yours, is fallible. But—if it's any help or comfort to you to know—I believe you're doing the right, courageous thing."

THAT midnight, thirty miles up Rivière Epinette, Spaulding halted and made a lonely camp in a drogue of paper birch. In the ghostly gray of dawn, despite the cold being most intense then, he roused the huskies and started on again, traveling all that day and far into the next night.

The weather showed signs of fairing off, and he wanted to make time while the chance was given him. Under the relentless pace his dogs were beginning to weaken, but he dared not slow up. Only Satan, the leader, did not falter. Spaulding knew that if the chase went on past Lem Fullerton's cache and swung west toward the Thunder Hills, before many miles he and the great black leader would be traveling alone.

The broad bosom of Rivière Epinette was a winter highway beyond compare. Smooth and unimpeded, its snow hard-packed by the blizzards of the moon just passing, it stretched through long, silent leagues of spruce and minaret pine straight away into the northwest.

The endless forest that he passed through —all life seemed frozen out of it. The moose and deer and woodland caribou had long since yarded in the depths of some birch swamp. By day he saw an occasional whisky-jack, a family of twittering snowflakes, or a tiny redpoll perched on a riverbank reed. At night he heard the deep-toned hooting of the Arctic horned owl or a faraway wolf chorus quivering on the still, taut air. But for the most part the woods were lifeless and silent; and the walls of spruce threw back the *skrunch* of his racquet beam, the steady whine of *komatik* runners on dry snow.

One hundred and forty miles up the Epinette, where the river began to dwindle and to corkscrew from one lake system to another, he cut aside from the stream he had been following and struck left into the Strong Woods. Partly by his instinct of direction, partly by observing the sun and stars, he traveled on northwest, heading straight as a teal-flight for his goal.

It was a wild, uncharted, unknown country that he traversed. Now a region of heavy pine forest. Now an upland where the graceful, slender spruce, eight inches across at their base, towered a hundred feet in the air. Now a gloomy swamp country of birch and banksian. Now a nameless whitefish river that he followed. Now a nameless range of hills he whipped over, where the tenacious lodgepole pines, exposed to sub-Arctic blizzards, were twisted and gnarled out of all semblance to timber.

It was a period between blizzards, a period of still, beautiful cold—so still that his breath trailed behind him in frozen white wisps, so cold that at times he breathed through the fur of his mittens as he ran ahead of his team. By day a wan coppery sun, surrounded by a halo of sun-dogs, swung through its short arc in the pale apple-green sky. With night came the aurora shooting its searchlights of violets and vivid reds and exotic orange and yellow down from the northern heavens.

One evening, an hour after dark had fallen, Spaulding at last reached Lem Fullerton's secret cache.

IT was a squat cabin, heavily built to keep out bear or carcajou, roofed with six-inch logs and banked halfway to the eaves with granite rocks. It sat a bowshot back from a creek bank—hidden from canoes traversing that stream in summer.

It seemed tenantless to Spaulding as he crept upon it cautiously. There was no glimmer of light through the bear-gut window, no pencil of smoke against the star-studded sky. And Satan, crouching beside Spaulding, raised his keen nose and sniffed at the shack without growling.

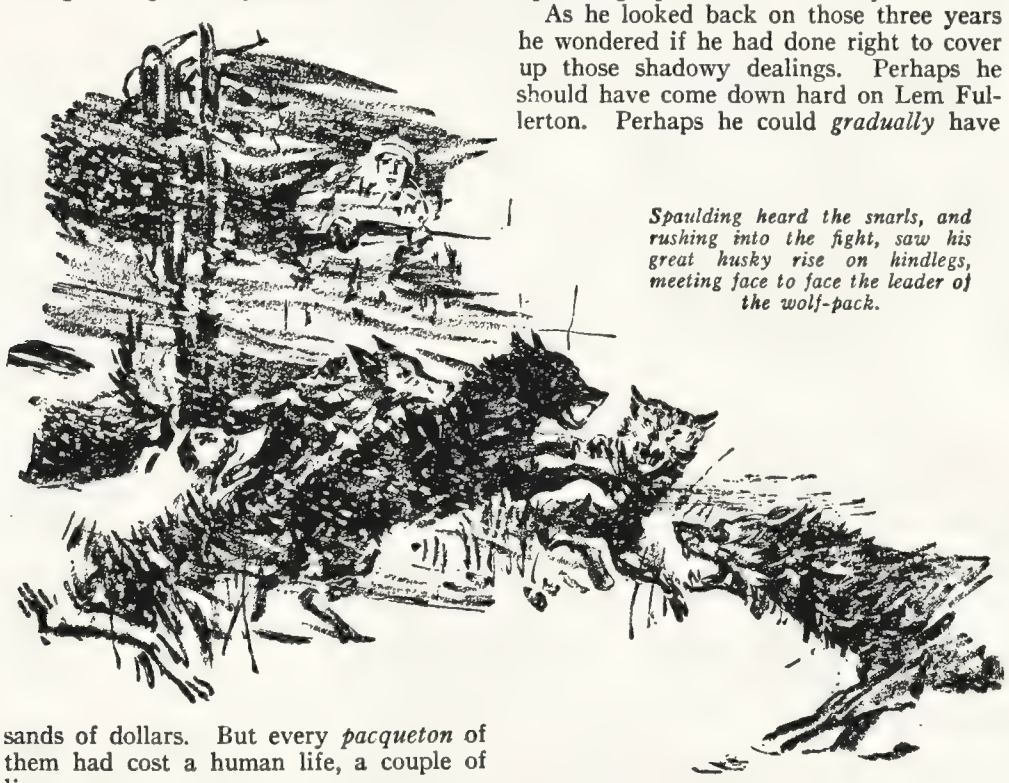
Spaulding strode on up, lifted the massive door-bar, and stepped inside. By the light of his electric lantern he looked around. A few small casks of "permit," a dozen carrots of tobacco, odds and ends of trade goods; and against the far wall a stack of green peltry—*pacquetons* of marten, mink, otter and dark fox.

Lem Fullerton had beaten him there, had left the incriminating furs, had gone on westward!

After kindling a fire in the sheet-iron stove, Spaulding brought the rest of his

team inside, thawed the ice out of their fur and watched them drop asleep on the floor. He himself sat up an hour, restringing a snowshoe, feeding the stove, thinking.

The peltry stacked against the wall drew his eyes like a magnet. He could not help glancing at it. Fullerton had made a haul, a harvest rich indeed. Those beautiful, dark-gleaming furs represented many thousands of dollars. But every *pacqueton* of them had cost a human life, a couple of lives.



Spaulding heard the snarls, and rushing into the fight, saw his great husky rise on hindlegs, meeting face to face the leader of the wolf-pack.

It was no wonder Norrys at first had not believed a man capable of that. There were incidents of the last three years which Norrys knew nothing about, incidents which would have prepared him to believe, incidents to which this death-scattering trip was only a climax. All of them sprang from the trader's selfishness and his greed for money, money!

One of them came back to Spaulding in all its sordid details as he sat working on his racquet. He seldom allowed himself to think about it, for it roused him to overpowering anger. It concerned a big-game hunter who had come north that autumn past with guides and silk tents and fancy rifles to hunt moose; and his crazed infatuation for Aurore, and his very decent proffer of marriage. And then, when that failed, his offer to Lem Fullerton of money enough to live the rest of his years at the Pas in idle comfort, if he would bring about "some arrangement."

Spaulding could understand and even excuse the infatuation. But Lem Fullerton's attempt to coerce Aurore, to drive that infamous bargain like any Dog-Rib selling his daughter—that was beyond Spaulding's patience and charity.

As he looked back on those three years he wondered if he had done right to cover up those shadowy dealings. Perhaps he should have come down hard on Lem Fullerton. Perhaps he could *gradually* have opened Aurore's eyes—and Dick's—to the sorry truth. Perhaps—but hindsight was easy. He had acted then according to his best judgment, his clearest conscience. The past was dead beyond resurrection; it was the future that troubled Spaulding.

During their last talk back at the stricken camp of the Epinette Crees, Norrys in his wise quiet way had asked a tremendous question: "Can you ever marry Aurore—remembering that?" There were times when Spaulding swore he could bury the memory and forget it utterly. But in moments of deeper insight he knew that he could not. He could and would marry her. But in the long years ahead he could never look into her candid, innocent eyes without those memories trooping back, without that secret thrusting its ogre face between them.

THE next morning, when Spaulding was harnessing up his team outside, he halted in surprise. From his examination of the cache he had believed that Fullerton left there five or six days before. But outside, that morning, he discovered tracks of Fullerton's *komatik* and racquets, tracks not more than two days old.

He would have a trail to follow, instead of striking blindly westward and ferreting the trader out in that hill country. And it meant he would come up with Fullerton in four days at the most, if he traveled swiftly and no blizzard struck to blot out the tracks.

Taking up the trail, he followed it westward. At midafternoon he clipped past Fullerton's first night camp; and the tracks thereafter were markedly fresher. At purpling twilight two of his dogs dropped in their traces. He unhitched them, scraped out a snow-burrow, left them a dozen frozen whitefish in case they revived—and hurried on, following the tracks by his electric torch.

The next noon three more of his huskies gave out; and the other two, even with Satan's help, could not pull the *komatik*. Abandoning sled, team, packs—everything save his rifle, his sleeping-pouch and a few days' food for himself and the husky leader, —Spaulding pushed on.

The tracks were steadily getting fresher. He knew he would overtake Fullerton within thirty-six hours—if nothing checked his pursuit. Anxiously he kept glancing at the sky. For the last ten days the weather had favored him. It could not last. Already a brick-dust sheen—the herald of a blizzard—hung above the northeast horizon; and the Strong Woods had the hushed expectancy that told of a storm at hand.

LATE that afternoon he ran into a caribou yard; a small band of the animals had trampled down several square rods in a swamp, making a hard-packed arena to fight off wolves. Their paths, deep as a man's head and hands, led out into birch thickets where they browsed. Spaulding stopped long enough to shoot a yearling bull and cook a strengthening meal for himself and Satan. Because of the coming storm and the uncertainty of food in that frozen solitude, he took along a dozen pounds of the meat.

He hoped to come upon Lem Fullerton's camp that night. He unslung his rifle and carried it ready. Fullerton's dogs would give the trader warning. At first glimpse of his pursuer, the trader would understand that here was the final accounting between them, Spaulding knew.

BUT his caution was needless. His pace had slackened, and the trail led through a deer-bush country where travel was a torture. When morning broke and he came across Fullerton's camp, the tracks leading on westward were a couple of hours old.

A faint wind was whining through the spruce tops as he took up the chase for a last supreme effort. A scum of leaden cloud was scudding out of the northeast. All that morning, as he hung doggedly to the trail, the whining overhead dropped lower, and grew more ominous; and the film of cloud deepened into a grayish-black.

At midafternoon the blizzard suddenly swooped to earth and loosed its full-lunged fury. The trail, so fresh now that snow still tumbled into the groove of the *komatik* runners, was blotted out in a twinkling. The surface of the snow seethed and crawled. Fantastic, wind-born wraiths rose up and whirled out of sight down-wind. The savage, clublike blasts rocked the pines and spruces, and streamed their mile-long banners through the air. They wrapped and blanketed Spaulding in smothering spindrift; they fought at him, clutched at him; and their spicules of snow and ice stung him like tiny daggers.

He struggled on, despite storm, exhaustion and the specter of defeat. The tracks were hidden from his eyes, but the fresh scent of man and dogs was not hidden from the keen nose of Satan. The great black dog trotted ahead now. He knew it was his business to follow the trail they had been on so many miles, and he followed it, so unerringly, swiftly, that Spaulding broke into a run to keep up with him.

In all that inferno of storm and gathering dark and blinding spindrift, Spaulding's instinct for direction clung to him. It seemed to him that the trail did not lead straight; that it wandered erratically, corkscrewed and doubled back upon itself. He reasoned that Fullerton was hunting a sheltered camp-site to wait out the blizzard, and so was probably less than a mile away.

For the last several hours he had been aware of seven wolves flanking him out in the deer-bush. They had smelled the fresh meat he carried, and had followed. He had glimpsed them several times, filtering like tawny shadows through the undergrowth,

but keeping their distance. He paid no attention to them. From their wary behavior he knew they would never close upon him.

When the blizzard struck they drew nearer. Through rifts in the swirling spindrift he caught glimpses of them, forty yards away. They bothered Satan at his trailing. Whenever the husky leader got too far ahead of his master, they threatened to spring in and attack him. Spaulding was tempted to shoot a couple and drive the pack away. But Fullerton was somewhere close; he might hear the rifle-shots, take warning and escape.

IT seemed to Spaulding that darkness and the wolf threat and Satan's losing the trail irrecoverably all came to a head at the same instant.

In a heavy dark forest of wind-whipping pine the trail crossed and recrossed itself a dozen times, circling like the path of a drunken man. The intricacies of it baffled Satan. He tried valiantly to straighten it out, to follow its tortuous route. Even after he had lost it completely, he strove to pick it up again. Circling wider and wider, stopping at times to dig in the snow for scent, he got too far away from Spaulding, and the wolf pack cut him off.

Spaulding heard the thrashing of underbrush, the snarls, and hurried up. The great dog had gone down under the first rush, but had fought to his feet again. The wolves were surging over him, a wave of gray forms, trying to drag him down. Rushing into the fight, Spaulding saw his husky tear the throat out of a wolf; saw him crunch the leg of another in his powerful jaws; saw him rise up on hindlegs, meeting fang to fang the big tawny leader of the pack.

Spaulding's heavy rifle spoke four times. He dared not shoot the wolf leader, and there was no need. For Satan rode him down, pinned him on the snow. A few moments of fangs clashing, of muzzles sparring for a death-grip, and the great dog found the throttle hold. . . . .

While Spaulding was kneeling, prying Satan loose from the twitching tawny form, he heard a sudden yelp and a flurry of barking behind him. Whirling, he saw several long gray forms leaping out of the murky twilight toward him. At first he thought they were wolves—another pack; but the significance of the *barking* stayed him from swinging his clubbed rifle at them.

Dogs! A husky team! They had heard the rifle-shots flung down-wind, or had caught the wolf scent, and rushed away from camp to join the fight!

And then as they slipped past him—snarling at the dead wolves—he saw them plainly, and suddenly realized they were the dog-team of Lem Fullerton.

Quickly, before their tracks were whipped shut, Spaulding took up their back-trail. It led down-wind—as he had guessed. He hurried, forgetting to reload his rifle or to thrash his numbed right hand back to usefulness.

Dimly through the blind swirl the outlines of a tent rose up before him. A few paces closer, and he made out the figure of a man staggering toward the tent, a load of firewood in his arms. Then a furious blast struck and blotted out vision.

Spaulding stepped forward.

AT the Fullerton trading station five people waited through the lengthening weeks in growing suspense. The focus of their sharp anxiety was Arnold Spaulding.

It was verging on two months now since he parted from Norrys and struck out alone into the northwest. Reckoning all possible delay from blizzards and hard traveling, he should have returned long before this. But not a word had they heard from him; not a whisper had come out of the Strong Woods. Something had happened to him. His long absence could not otherwise be explained. And as proof of some disaster, three of his dogs had come trickling in, gaunt and woe-begone, their coats matted with ice.

Dick Fullerton, on his frequent trips to the post, kept insisting: "Spaulding's after that half-breed trader. He'll turn up somewhere with the dirty skunk. Maybe west on the Athabasca, maybe clear over east to Hudson Bay. Don't worry about the dogs' coming back; I've seen him wear out dogs before. He wont come in till he nails the cuss he's after. Not Spaulding."

Part of that was for Aurore's benefit; part of it sprang from Dick's unlimited confidence in his friend and superior officer. But Norrys knew better.

One of those five who waited was Apah-Stamik, the Bull Mink. From Norrys and from an Indian runner the Chief had heard what happened to the Piney Crees and the two other bands. The news of it hit him like an avalanche. It thoroughly opened his eyes to what Spaulding had saved him

and his whole encampment from. It stirred him to sober thought, and cured him of his stubborn hostility toward the Police.

Though the danger was past, the disease stamped out, he walked softly those days —Apah-Stamik. His squaw-club was no longer in evidence; he refrained from pounding his chest arrogantly. Out of gratitude to the yellow-striped Sergeant he had come to the post with a potlatch—an exquisite pair of matched silver foxes. Half-guessing that Spaulding, if he ever returned, would refuse the costly present, he had given them to the white man's intended *squaw-siche* Aurore. It was a gesture so graceful, so utterly at odds with his former contempt of womankind, so respectful, that Aurore could not refuse.

John Ear-to-the-Ground was another of those who waited. He went about tight-lipped, his smoky, hawklike face betraying nothing of what he knew. When the huskies returned he had tried to back-trail them, but their tracks were blotted out forty miles north. Norrys suggested an extended search party.

"What use?" the Indian countered, out of his woods experience. "Beeg snow cover everytheeng up. Bimeby snow go, ice go; *then* I go. Hunt all summer. Find heem sure? How can tell? How can say where weend blows gray goose feather?"

That "bimeby" had come now. The Moon-of-Hoar-Frost had passed, and the Moon-of-Whispering-South-Winds brought promise of an early spring. Some of the larger rivers already had gone out. Except in heavy forests the snow was sodden slush. The horned lark and the longspur were back; mallards, pintails and trumpeter swans were winging north in pairs. In a day or two John Ear-to-the-Ground was starting on his long hunt.

THAT night when their waiting ended, Norrys had gone outside the post to be alone. Near the clearing edge he leaned against a cord of fuel wood, listening meditatively to the migrants honking overhead across the face of the brilliant moon. A light breeze whispered across the clearing. A zero tang was in the air, but the northern lights were faint, and the dark forest in front of him seemed to stir restlessly, aquiver with the breath of spring.

In the cabin to his left Madame Perrault was putting her three *p'tites* to bed. In the trading hall her husband was bargaining with some Indians over their tucks of fur. A candle glowed in the window of Aurore's room. She and Dick were there, talking. Through the curtains drawn back Norrys saw the bright scarlet of Dick's jacket, and Aurore's fine shapely head and throat outlined against the pane. She was leaning toward her brother, her chin cupped in her hand—wistful, lonely, trying to believe when he assured her that Spaulding would certainly return.

Neither of them in the last few weeks had spoken about their father. He had been gone most of the winter, and they knew something had befallen him. The Indian runner whom Dick had sent west to the Thunder Hills, returned with the word that he had never been seen or heard of over there at all. They could only wait in suspense, praying that at least they might sometime know definitely what had happened.

Norrys, too, wanted to believe that Spaulding would surely return. He wanted to believe that, after the storms of the last three months, the spring was symbolic of all this trouble blown over. But he saw no way for that to be. Even if he should return now, *alone*, he would bring with him the heavy secret of what he had done north there in the Strong Woods.

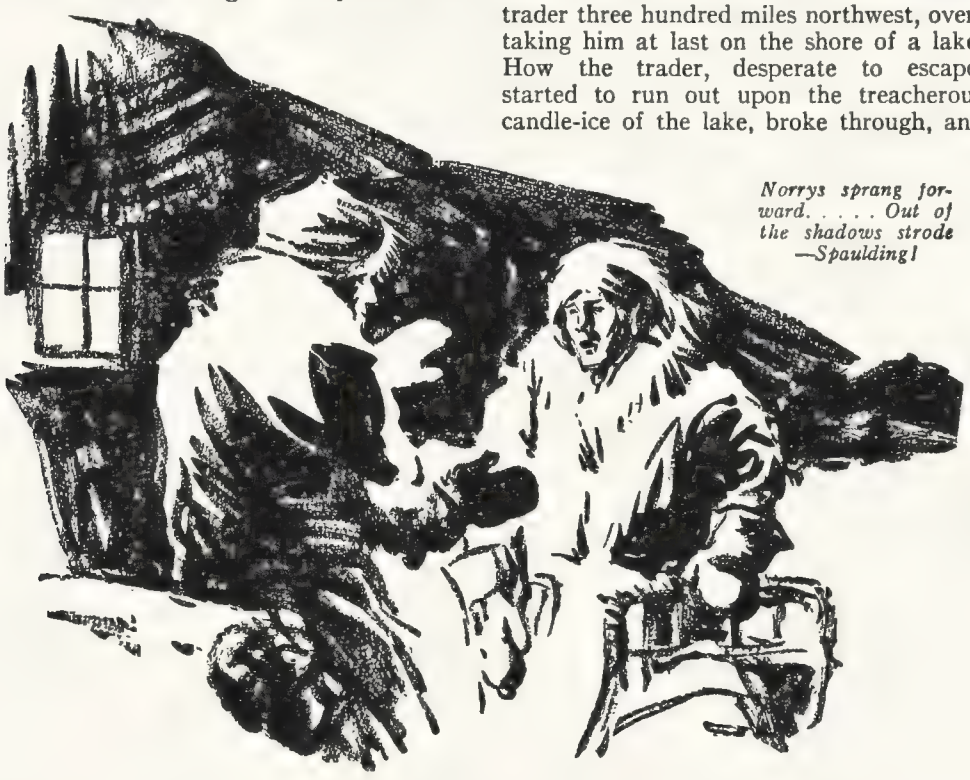
He knew that Spaulding, for all his strength of purpose, was very human. The secret would weigh upon him during the long years to come. Deliberately Spaulding had assumed that load to shield others—those two there in the candle-glow. He had not called it sacrifice; he spoke of it as a thing which *had to be done*. But his voice when he had said, "Maybe I can make myself forget—I don't know!"—the hopelessness of his voice lingered with Norrys yet.

What Spaulding had deliberately taken upon himself—it seemed to Norrys more than a mortal should be called upon to bear, more than merciful Providence would ask or would allow. During the last several weeks he had clung to that devout belief for comfort. His clear reason told him there was no possible way out for Spaulding. His faith, defying the sheer impossibility, told him *there had to be!*

NEARLY out of earshot, north of him in the woods, Norrys heard a faint scratching noise. It came nearer, grew more distinct, louder, till he made out the crackle of racquets on the snow-crust, and the swish of *komatik* runners.

He straightened up, listening intently The *komatik* was heading straight toward him, guided by the candle-light in Aurore's window. Presently a big black husky, unharnessed, trotted out of the dark shadows into the brilliant moonlight. Behind him came a team of dogs, whining in their eagerness to be home.

Lem Fullerton's dogs! Norrys shook off his daze and sprang forward, an inarticulate cry on his lips. But his fear was cut short. Out of the shadows strode a figure —Spaulding.



Norrys sprang forward. . . . . Out of the shadows strode —Spaulding!

They shook hands in silence. Norrys asked no questions. Spaulding's coming back with Lem Fullerton's dogs—that told its own story. But Norrys was puzzled by the younger man's manner. Spaulding's gloom had dropped from him. The stern, hard lines of his face were smoothed out. His voice was grave but quietly cheerful when he spoke.

"I heard—met an Indian this afternoon —that Dick's here. Bring him out to me, wont you, Norrys? Don't tell Aurore I've come. Not yet—till I see Dick. Later I'll talk to you."

He was still there at the shadow's edge when Norrys returned with Dick. Watching the greeting between them, Norrys saw a little deeper than ever he had seen before into younger Fullerton's admiration for Spaulding; into the latter's strong brotherly regard for the corporal.

Dick did not notice that Spaulding was driving his father's dogs. As gently as he could, Spaulding broke the news to him:

How he had followed this half-breed trader three hundred miles northwest, overtaking him at last on the shore of a lake. How the trader, desperate to escape, started to run out upon the treacherous candle-ice of the lake, broke through, and so died. How, returning along the eastern spur of the Thunder Hills, Spaulding had found Lem Fullerton's dog-team and *komatik*. How, surmising an accident, he back-tracked the team to where an avalanche had cut a sharp swath down a hill-slope, burying the valley under a mass of rock and splintered timber—

Norrys tried not to listen to the lie. It tugged at him to see how implicitly Dick believed the whole impossible story.

After a while he saw Dick turn, and slowly go back into the trading-post to tell Aurore. Spaulding stood watching for several minutes—watching the lighted window of her room for a glimpse of her. Presently he came over to Norrys.

"It will be a blow to them, of course," he said quietly. "But it's something they can forget, erase—especially since the

three of us are going away—next month. New work, new surroundings, a new life—"

Norrys winced at the thought of them leaving.

"I had to explain about my having the dog-team," Spaulding continued. "And it was better to end their suspense about him, than to have them worried, hoping, expecting him—for months—"

Norrys nodded.

"Dick took it very bravely, Norrys. He'd half-suspected it, and Aurore too—their father being gone so long. They're sensible. They'll accept it bravely enough after a time—"

"Yes," Norrys agreed huskily. "Death is a natural thing—to be accepted. Disgrace, dishonor, an ideal shattered, are not. What you mean to say, Spaulding—they have their father still. They'll always have him—because of what you did."

Spaulding did not answer directly.

MORE and more Norrys was puzzled by Spaulding's calmness, his quiet voice. But he restrained his questions. He knew that Spaulding, in his own time and way, would tell him the truth.

"There's another thing, Norrys—those furs. You've been wanting to build a little mission somewhere in your parish. They will build it. John Ear-to-the-Ground knows where the cache is. He'll take you there and help you bring them back. Perrault—Dick and Aurore surely will turn this post over to him, after his loyal years with them—Perrault will handle those furs. And he's too guileless to wonder much where they came from."

Norrys listened to the detailed instructions. His heart leaped when he pictured a mission, his very own, enabling him to do a hundred things hitherto impossible. A school, a tiny chapel, a printing-press for those pamphlets he was translating into Cree—all that was some recompense for losing Aurore's friendship, for losing his intimate association with Spaulding.

Spaulding seemed to be waiting. He kept glancing anxiously, impatiently at the door of the trading station, as he talked.

"And now, one last thing, Norrys—" He spoke very softly and plucked at birch paper on the cordwood. "One last thing you're wanting to hear—what happened up there. Sometimes—this last week when I was coming home—I doubted my memory. Doubted what my own eyes had seen. After what you and I ran into, over east at Rivière Epinette, it seems too fitting, too just to be true. You'll see in it a moral law, Divine retribution, at work. I see in it a scientific fact, inescapable as fate."

He stopped, and glanced around him into the shadows, as though he wanted no man on earth save Norrys to hear his words.

"When I left you," he went on, "I headed up to that cache I mentioned. He'd gone from there two days before. I trailed him—ran him down. The end came in a blinding blizzard. For an hour or two before I found him, I noticed his tracks were weaving—weaving this way and that like a drunken man's. It seemed he was hunting a place to camp. That's the only way I could explain it then. But instead, he was sick—desperately sick. I saw that, my first glance, when I walked out of the blizzard and met him face to face.

"I couldn't do what I had intended to do—not to a man who staggered, who didn't even know me, who was delirious.

"So I stayed there nursing him, doing what I could. Three weeks! I thought he would live. But the cold, the exposure, his age—he had a relapse. I gave him burial in the Strong Woods where he'd spent his life. You see, he took chances on an old vaccination, and—"

Norrys started wildly.

"Chances—old vaccination? Good God, you don't mean—it can't be true—what he gave to others—back upon himself?"

Slowly Spaulding nodded.

"Yes. The red death."

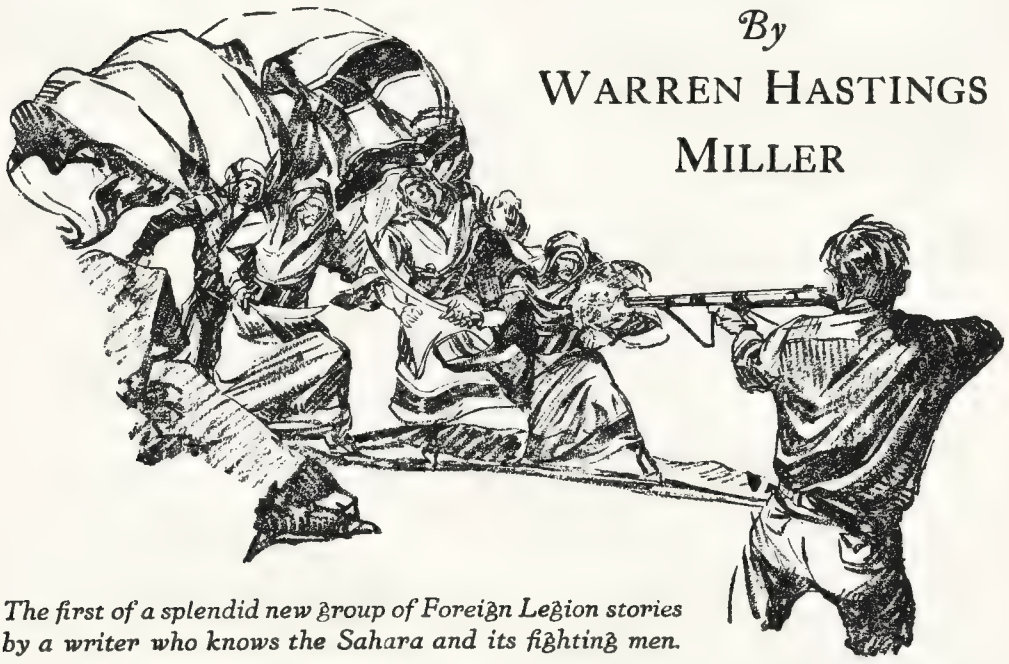
WHEN, a long half-hour afterward, the door of the trading station opened and Aurore came out alone, Norrys walked away into the shadows.

She came toward Spaulding hesitantly, as though doubting he was alive and back with her. The breeze whispering across the clearing molded her dress about her slender body, and the moonlight was upon her hair. In the softened, silvery flood she seemed a vision such as no man was worthy of—unless it was the man who went forward to meet her.

He went toward her courageously, without hesitation. In the center of the clearing, with a pair of wild swans trumpeting overhead, with the chastened, subdued roar of the river brought to them on the spring breeze, they met and stood a moment, looking at one another, before Spaulding bent down and slipped his arm around her, and their two figures merged into one.

The Lost Regiment

By
WARREN HASTINGS
MILLER



The first of a splendid new group of Foreign Legion stories by a writer who knows the Sahara and its fighting men.

The devil had broken loose now. Criswell braced himself to shoot fast.

Illustrated by Paul Lehman

"I DON'T like this, buddy—none a-tall I don't! We ought to hev reached this here well Bir Khemissa long ago. Thar aint nothin', yet, but *hammada.*"

Thus Sergeant Texas Ike, of the Foreign Legion, to Corporal James S. Criswell of Michigan. Criswell looked out over the *hammada.* Its bushy plain was like a creosote "sink" of some desert of the West. Flat, sandy swales extended on all sides of the round horizon-rim, dotted with millions of creosote bushes. Far ahead of the Légion Mounted column rode Hosain ben Denib, chief guide, and with him his small group of Arab assistants. They were keeping on south, and the Légion following, but it was a long time between drinks, and the water-camels had not much left in their kegs.

"Morbleu! Is it that they are lost?" put in Hortet, the grizzled old zouzou who had deserted to them from the Chasseurs because of an old friendship with Commandant Knecht. *"Diable!* Who ever heard of an Arab being lost in the Desert? And trust them, me—*jamais!*"

He shook his head with the ineradicable suspicion of the old soldier of North Africa. Hortet had been in all the campaigns since the Kybele uprisings. He was full of the traditions of the Army of Africa. His boyhood held memories of the last of the wars with that great Arab emir, Abd el Kader, the George Washington of Algeria. Every detail of those campaigns was familiar to Hortet through Army tradition.

The large and bulky Criswell turned to him with pained and troubled blue eyes. An idealist was Criswell, and it disturbed him that there was still a strong undercurrent of hostility between the Arab and the French. So far as he could see, unity in patriotism was the only future for North Africa. The Frenchmen in the Army were nearly all colonists, born and raised in Algeria. It would not be a hundred years more before they would declare their independence of France—as the American colonies had of England; and that pleased Criswell's dreams. He could see the same spirit growing here that gave birth to nationalism in America. And it simply *must* have the Arab's friendship.

"You think he is misleading us?" Criswell asked Hortet directly.

The zouzou shrugged. "Trust them—*jamais!*" he repeated. "You shall see! In their hearts they hate us. And it is down here that the monument of the Lost Regiment is erected. My own zouzous, *my* corps, they were! *Ouff!* Forty years ago, it was. When I was a young *bleu*. Twenty years later a reconnaissance expedition came upon the sad remains. Five hundred ragged skeletons of our zouzous, uncovered by the winds! The sands, they were strewed with them, *hélas!* And there was a note on the tunic of M. Le Capitaine Montredon commanding that they had been betrayed by false guides and all died of thirst, to the last man, *mon Dieu!* The government of Algeria caused a monument to be built over the one big grave. *Morbleu!*" Hortet gritted his teeth savagely. "It was one of the biggest *coups* of Abd el Kader, that betrayal! We of the Army of Africa never heard the last of it!"

CRISWELL shuddered over that grim Sahara tragedy. And it might very well happen to them *now* if this Hosain was really treacherous. The Légion had to find Bir el Khemissa very soon or go dry. Horses needed water, by the ton. The very least that could happen would be the whole command set on foot, conserving for its humans what water they still had. Yet the whole idea was repugnant to Criswell's idealism. Just *why* couldn't the Arabs let bygones be bygones and work loyally with the French?

The guides ahead had stopped. They were looking about and about over the endless *hammada* and conferring in energetic gesticulations. They looked lost, at variance among themselves. The Légion column trotted on, slowly catching up. Commandant Knecht, their big and bearded leader, rode hastily to the front with young Lieutenant Ressot at his side.

"We are lost, ya Sidi," Criswell heard Hosain announce. The sheik's dark eyes looked upon the commandant with that peculiar critical gaze of the Arab, a gaze that regretted nothing but was mainly interested on how the European would take *that* news. It was not pretty news, being lost in the Sahara with two hundred and fifty men and horses, all low on water!

"Tiens!" exclaimed the commandant. A sort of academic interest alone was discernible in his tone. "I have thought so since morning, Hosain!" he said cheerily. "Ressot, halt the command. We camp and tonight we will take a star sight and find out where we are. And send the *sergeant des logis"* (commissary) "to me."

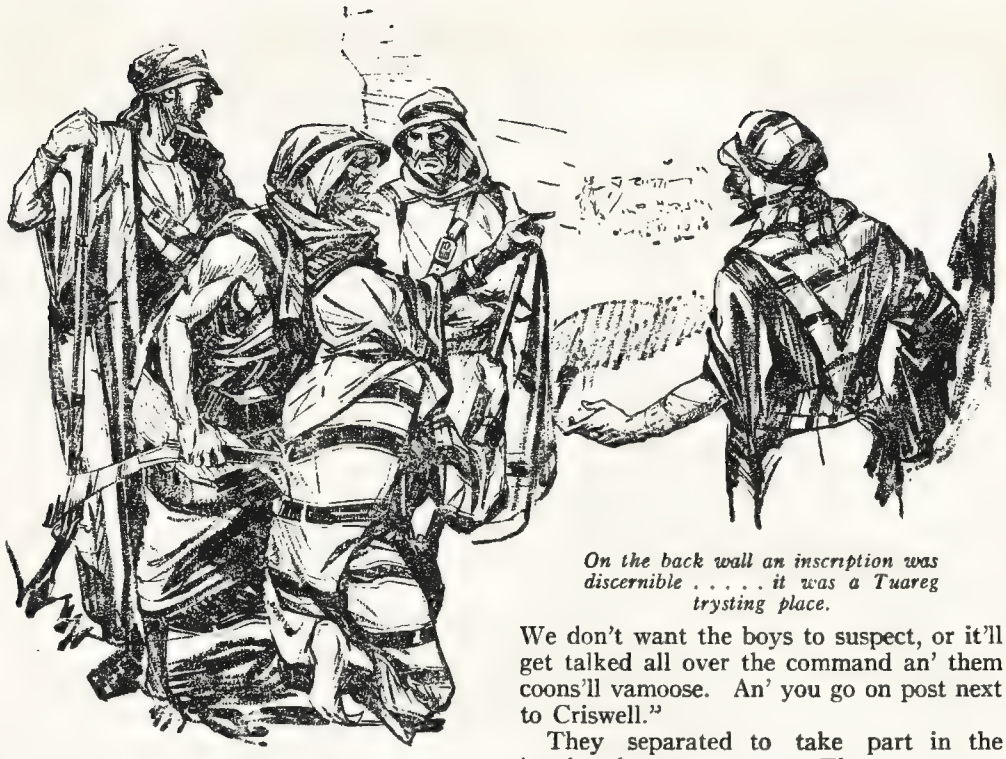
That was all. Not a trace of reproach, let alone suspicion. *Anyone* could get lost in the Sahara, seemed Knecht's viewpoint. It did not disturb him. The water-shortage could be managed, with careful rationing. Ike sat silently studying Hosain. The gentleman from Texas was a shrew[illegible] judge of men. He had not looked i[illegible] poker faces all his life for nothing! [illegible] was trying to divine, now, whethe[illegible] Arab chief guide was lying, bluffin[illegible] nocent. He saw an expression [illegible] ment, also a faint shade of per[illegible]bation, appear in that fixed and piercing gaze of Hosain's upon the commandant. It faded as almost imperceptibly as it had come, but the cause seemed to be that unconcerned announcement of Knecht's that he and Ressot would take a star sight by nightfall and find out where they were. Ike made up his mind:

"Hortet's right!" he whispered out of his left ear to Criswell. "This bozo's done led us down hyar, nowhere in the Sahara, on purpose! All coons look alike to *me!*" Ike added, refusing to admit that Hosain, for all his dark color, was of the white race.

Criswell came back with a distressed negative. It hurt his idealism, this discovery of abysmal treachery, right in the North Africa of the here and now. What was the motive, he seemed to ask bewilderedly.

Hortet supplied it. The zouzou was boiling over like a small kettle and would soon blow up in a French fit, unless relieved by a word with the commandant, privately. *"Ouff!* Criswell, you are one fool incurable!" he exploded upon the big Yank corporal. "We have been led astray by that *malin!* Ah, *bougre idiot!* Know you not Hosain's big name? But *I* know, me! It is Hosain ben Denib, ben Abd el Kader!"

Even Criswell knew enough Arabic to translate that: "Hosain, son of Denib, son of Abd el Kader!" It dumfounded him, for the moment, to realize how closely the past of North Africa was still bound up with its present, that he was actually looking at the grandson of the famous Abd el Kader—great name in history—in the person of their own chief guide.



On the back wall an inscription was discernible . . . . . it was a Tuareg trysting place.

"Abd el Kader died in exile in Syria in 1895," went on Hortet. "His son built the town of Bou Denib. This one, he is worshiped by the whole tribe of the Beni Denib. He was educated in the military school at Oran. He *should* be friendly to La France, but—*bah!*" Hortet raged, putting a world of exasperation into that one explosion, for his feeling had got beyond words.

Criswell had to admit the significance of all this, even though reluctantly. He could not doubt the gray old zouzou's knowledge of native affairs. Hortet had campaigned here too long not to know all the army gossip. And, of course, the grandson of Abd el Kader would be quite likely to conceal an ineradicable hatred to the French under an exterior of smooth and smiling acquiescence in the French conquest. All the Army knew how hot were the Arab fires of resentment under the lid.

Sergeant Ike drawled: "I aims to sot in this game, boys! Knecht, he's too good-natured an' simple to deal with these yere coons. An' we aint heard the last of this—even ef him an' Ressot gets our position tonight. Criswell, I'm puttin' you on sentry duty back of the guides' tent. You knows some Arabic. Listen in on what they're sayin', an' report to me ef they's up to any more ornery schemes. You, Hortet, shet yore head about all this We don't want the boys to suspect, or it'll get talked all over the command an' them coons'll vamoose. An' you go on post next to Criswell."

They separated to take part in the bustle of encampment. The men were silent as they unsaddled the horses, collected thorn-bush for the *zariba,* put up the big conical tent for Commandant Knecht and Lieutenant Ressot. There were not the usual camp-fire songs. An air of dread hung over everything as the news spread around that they were indeed lost in the Sahara and would soon be at the mercy of its thirst. Hortet, with grim humor, regaled the first-year men with his story of the Monument and its five hundred zouave skeletons near here. Ike shut him up presently; but the lining-up for water, of which each man received only a cupful for the next twenty-four hours, brought those five hundred skeletons dancing again, vividly. What happened once might very well happen again. This time, the Légion!

THE dusty Sahara sunset came on, bathing the vast plain of the *hammada* in orange and red. Dry clouds, drifting high overhead, turned to rose, purple, violet, then a ghastly green, before fading. The North Star shone duskily over the horizon—back home over Sidi bel Abbès where green things grew—and the Légion looked at it anxiously.

Knecht and Ressot were busy with watches and an instrument as Criswell went on his post in ambuscade. It was the usual *embuscade* formation of Sahara

campaigning, sentries posted out in the bush beyond the *zariba,* each man silent, motionless, watching from the concealment of a creosote bush. It was the best safeguard yet devised against hostiles creeping into camp or knifing the pacing sentry and making off with his rifle.

Criswell had chosen a bush not thirty feet from the guides' tent within the *zariba.* From within its black goat-hair cloth walls was coming a continuous chatter of harsh Arabic. They were excited about something. There were four voices urging the sheik to do something about it, and occasionally his monosyllabic reply, the tones of which seemed discouraged. Criswell listened intently. He could not make much of it; but one word kept recurring, always in insistent and urgent tones. It was *"habuss," prison;* and Criswell knew that, for he had often threatened the ubiquitous Arab small boy with it. It also meant "arrest" when used with the familiar verb, *"hott," to put.* Also he made out *"arb," to fly, decamp,* urged insistently.

Criswell tingled as he pieced this out. It was a confession, good as written out, that guilty fear of prison that the sheik's men were voicing! Once Knecht found their true position, even he could not further believe that they had been innocently led so far in the wrong direction. Inevitably would follow the Commandant's suspicion, their arrest, a third-degree. And some of them were urging the sheik to flee while there was yet time.

"Na'am!" (All right!), said the sheik finally, and then they all fell silent. Criswell's excitement redoubled. They had settled something, in there, and were now going about putting it into action! Black was their tent under the dusty stars; its small spark of fire was a mere chink of red light through its thick cloth. Criswell moved up nearer the *zariba.* The guides' horses were picketed just outside their tent and were lying down. They would be cuffed silently to their feet, mounted quietly—and then there would be a concerted bound over the hedge and they would be off like the wind into the Desert.

NOT while he and his rifle were there to stop them, Criswell decided grimly. The bare fact that this *was* a betrayal, by a supposedly loyal sheik, made him sick. *Why* couldn't they get along? And hadn't the man any gratitude toward his French brother-officers, who had trained him so carefully and had reposed enough confidence in him to appoint him chief guide for this Légion reconnaissance?

He was fuming over that, rifle poised ready in his hands, when something swished sharply through the black night and he felt himself suddenly enclosed in a strong loop of rawhide that whipped his rifle close in to his chest and set it off, muzzle up in the air, before he could even get his finger out of the trigger-guard. He was jerked violently off his feet by that lariat, heard the stamp and thump of hoofs leaping *zariba,* heard a yelp from Hortet and crack of his rifle; then he was sl violently head-foremost over the helpless as a log. Bushes smote and as he crashed through them. Criswell's lungs were compressed by that loop as if in a vise. His subconscious mind was still fighting desperately for breath, for life; within a very few seconds his conscious mind had faded out, and everything went blank in a dizzy, whirling bewilderment of futile rage and terror. That they would probably cut his throat and take his rifle was his last thought!

CRISWELL must have been unconscious for some time. His return to this life was marked by a violent jolt and a sense of sliding down rapidly. He was hanging head-downward over a saddle-bow, and the pit of his stomach was being pounded cruelly by its hard pommel. His head rang; it was bathed by a sticky moisture that must be blood. He found his hands clinched fast around a strap and realized that that must have been an action directed by the mysterious subconscious brain, for he could not remember even being dragged up on this horse.

Its rider was now pacing him slowly. Criswell noted, dully, that they were in some kind of deep and bare rocky ravine, but he did not care much. His head ached and throbbed. There was a scalp wound, up there in his hair, probably a blow from the flying hoofs of this horse. He tried to reach it with one hand—gave it up.

They kept on up the ravine for some time and then stopped. Criswell was brushed off the horse by the heave of a rough hand on his shoulders and fell heavily. He lay there gasping, enduring shooting pains in both arms, the returning circulation where that lariat had been cinched around them all this time. Dim figures in the black of night dismounted;

one rode off to reconnoiter. It was still pitch dark; but Criswell observed that Orion was now far in the west. That constellation had been overhead when Hosain and his clansmen guides had ridden over him and escaped, Criswell remembered. He began to think, again, to piece it all out. The sheik had hauled him up on the saddle, but for what motive Criswell could not imagine. Probably to save cutting the lariat, he reasoned with a grim turn of humor. Arabs were childish about the relative value of things! And pursuit across the *hammada* would not be as easy as it looked. Precious moments would have to elapse before Sergeant Ike and his squad could saddle after Hortet's alarm. In that time the Arabs would have ridden far through the bushes; and they were shoulder-high to a horse, concealing the moving legs, showing only the small dark dots that marked their riders. In a straight run, those points would not move much, as seen by the pursuit squad; in fact, they would not be visible at all, at night, in the dusty gloom, once even half a mile distant.

And then they all had vanished into this rocky ravine, one of hundreds of such scoriating the Sahara. Sergeant Ike would come to it eventually. Which way he would turn, then, was pure chance. Criswell himself did not know whether he had been taken east or west.

They were talking about him now, for one of the Beni Denib was pointing at him and asking the sheik what was to be done.

"*Yallah!* He is good bait!" Criswell heard Hosain laugh. "The Monument! They will come! But first we find water."

El ma! Water! That last word started up all Criswell's bodily complaints, full-armed. He hoped they would find some, soon, and perhaps let him get at it. Flies had already found him. The rest of the sheik's reply Criswell could only guess at, from certain familiar key-words that he knew. The plan seemed to be to take him to the Monument and leave him there. Ike's squad could track him; but having mounted hastily and dashed to the pursuit, would arrive there short of water too. If five hundred zouaves had perished there of thirst, it would not be a good place to come to with spent and thirsty horses! Criswell growled inwardly. His was the nature that is trusting and confident in his fellow-man, but all the more bitter when that man proves himself cold-blooded and treacherous. He had been disillusioned once before, in the affair with Abd el Halim; now Hosain was arousing more than disillusionment, disgust. Treachery he loathed. All military service was based on loyalty. If you could not take the oath whole-heartedly, you had no business at all with real men like the Légion buddies! Criswell decided that at any cost he would take a personal hand in this plot when things arrived at a crisis at the Monument.

Just now he was fully occupied in getting better and in wondering how they were going to find this water. They were doing nothing, just waiting for dawn. A rocky cave loomed up, black and cavernous, close at hand, and they all seemed to be waiting for what it might tell them. Criswell caught the word "Tuareg" occasionally in their talk.

THE sky paled, and it grew light in the east. Slowly the landscape developed, a jagged and rocky ravine with hardly a trace of vegetation in it. It led upward gradually to a red range of volcanic eruptions to the eastward. And gradually the interior of the cave grew visible. Criswell heard an ejaculatory exclamation from the sheik, and there were nods of satisfaction from his followers, and again the word "Tuareg." On the back wall of the cave an inscription was becoming discernible. It was in rude crosses, bars, dots and squares, done in yellow ochre earth-paint. It might have existed here for centuries. Even now this part of the Sahara was still Tuareg country, of the Iguidi *tobois* (clans).

They were all looking at it, now, and the sheik reading aloud: *"Aoua nek Nana emmouter' joull aouadem ien tamatart ehad-n-din n adjenna."*

They all laughed as Hosain translated: *"I, Nana, am dying for a man. Sign of the tryst, a night when it rains."*

Criswell could not see the joke, but gathered from the signs that it was a Tuareg trysting-place, and that once a woman came here. Primitive were the Tuareg customs! But it argued water, not far off, and that was what Hosain was waiting for this cave to tell them. As they had passed no tank in the rocks, it must be still further up.

They all mounted, and the sheik told Criswell curtly in French to get up and follow. He found that he could rise, walk; in fact, he *must* keep up with them, for

his body was burning up for water and his mouth was dry. The horses picked their way up and up the gorge; then it took a deep dip, and they descended into a rocky pit that had jagged and precipitous sides and resembled some conception from Dante's Inferno.

The horses neighed first. There was water, here, and they knew it already. Exclamations of pleasure from the Arabs; then they had worked downward through the boulders and come to it, a deep tank, overhung with slabs of tumbled rock that protected it from the sun.

The horses were sucking with soft muzzles buried deep, the men drinking and filling their leather *guerbas*. Even Criswell was allowed to drink and wash. The sheik was looking at him, curiously, by the time they were ready to go on. His prisoner was physically much better and might become dangerous, Criswell gathered from that look. He was not surprised when they tied his hands behind his back with that lariat and attached its other end to Hosain's saddlebow.

There was some consultation next. Water. . . . . Was there a pasturage near here, or was it a mere meeting-point for raiders? Again that woman of the cave seemed to answer it, for she would seek warriors. They had no use for the tame folk who stayed at home, nor for such a prosaic institution as marriage either! Hosain decided to keep on up into this range.

SOON they were among high red pinnacles that might have belonged to the mountains on the moon, so bare and scorching were they. The view below was superb. The Saharan horizon extended to a vast bowl of some sixty miles circumference. Criswell fast orientated himself as they all scanned that enormous panorama spread out below this range; and Sergeant Ike's saying that you could "look farther and see less in the Sahara than even in Texas" came to him with force. To the east of the range lay dunes, a boundless extent of them, a petrified ocean of sand-waves, shaped exactly like the tumbled hillocks of a stormy sea, murky with yellow dust, but empty of all life, silent, and broiling in the heat. There were three separate mirages on its sector of the horizon, floating weirdly above the sky line.

"Ed—Djouf!" remarked the sheik, and by that Criswell knew that those were indeed mirages, for the Djouf extended for a thousand miles clear to the Sudan and not a drink the whole way. It was with relief that he turned from that terrific sand ocean to look west.

Here was the familiar *hammada* again. It reached, flat and bush-dotted, all the way to the horizon. Over there somewhere was the Légion camp. It must be more than thirty miles off, Criswell reasoned, for they had not been able to see this range from there. However, the pursuit squa- should be in sight somewhere in all th-

He looked south. The range cut down swiftly there and soon sank into the desert in that deep crack of a ravine. Ike should be coming up it on their trail by now, he thought; but then there was a simultaneous exclamation from all the Arabs, and they were pointing out over the *hammada*.

"Er-Roumi!" ejaculated Hosain, and laughed sardonically.

For some time Criswell could not see them. Then he made out a tiny brown dot that was moving almost imperceptibly. They were going northward, so far as could be ascertained. That dot was a column of Légion horses and men, but they weren't heading anywhere near this range, Criswell noted discouragedly. At that moment he felt more completely than ever in the power of this fanatical sheik. And he knew that the Arab had no bowels of compassion. What they were going to do with him now was interesting. At least the bait scheme seemed to have fallen through, and Criswell cheered up. He could die alone, without involving others in his fate.

"Yemshi-na!" ("Let's go!") ordered the sheik, and set the horses in motion. They kept on through the range. They seemed to know just where they were, and were apparently heading for some farther objective. The going was atrocious, not even goat-paths to follow, but eventually they came out on the north front of the range. *Hammada* again; but it soon ended in a flat *erg* of grim and forbidding basalt pebbles, strewn with fine sand. And far out to the north rose a lonely stone cairn.

CRISWELL did not need to be told that it was that Monument. Here, forty years ago, five hundred zouaves had plodded under a pitiless sun, headed north until they had all succumbed to thirst. And—the irony of it!—half a day's march south of them lay water, that tank in the rocks of this range! Criswell noted how

that plot had been worked, its similarity to this present one of Hosain's. Abd el Kader's guides had simply left the zouaves by night and gone back to this range. They knew of that water. Hosain only knew the tradition that there *was* water in the range, and had located it by the Tuareg cave. He had intended leading Knecht's command through the *hammada* until near this range and then deserting—only the range itself had failed to appear.

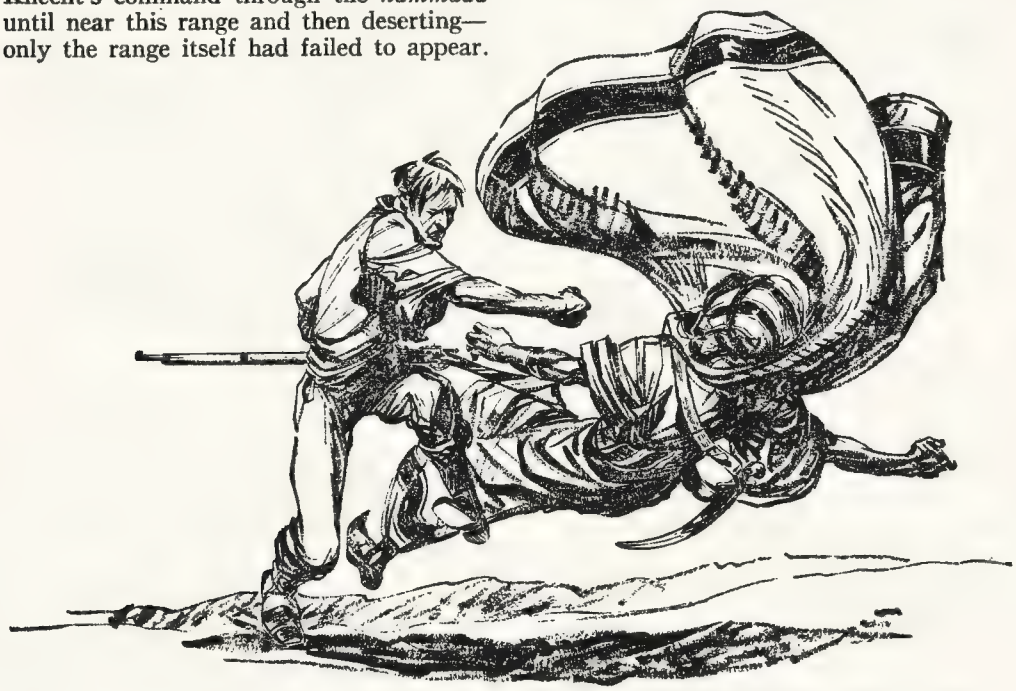
Their dash for escape had located it for them, quite by chance. They had been really lost, in the afternoon of yesterday—but the treacherous intention had been there just the same!

Criswell thought bewilderedly around and around his predicament during that march out to the Monument. His mind was at rest over being any longer a lure that would lead his comrades to their deaths, but his own life was sweet, and he proposed to save it if they left him any loophole whatever. But how? His rifle was in the hands of his captors; nor would he ever get a chance at it. No use to try for a horse, either; each one of the guide squad had a good Lébel carbine under his thigh in its saddle-case. They could shoot him down with ease on this empty flat *erg*. Argument? As well argue with a serpent as with this fanatic grandson of Abd el Kader! Nope, no way out, however you looked at it, was Criswell's dreary conclusion.

They neared the high stone cairn. It bore a simple bronze plaque secured to a flat bock halfway up its pyramid.

AUX MORTS POUR LA PATRIE
17me Regt. de Zouaves
1862

Hosain and his comrades dismounted and made prayer toward Mecca. Then the



He made a sudden leap, and his fist smote the ruffian with the rifle.

sheik turned toward the Monument and began what appeared to be an impressive invocation to his own great forebear: "O Grandfather illustrious!" he cried. "It is but one Roumi I bring, not two hundred! But the Day of Deliverance is at hand."

THE rest was lost on Criswell, being too rapid Arabic for him. He could judge by the tones that Abd el Kader was being assured that his people were not resting supinely under the French heel, but were preparing, slowly but surely, for the Day. *El Youm!* It recurred again and again in Hosain's harangue, and it made Criswell restless. He spoke out from the shoulder when the sheik had finished his invocation:

"Foolishness, *ya shiikh!*" he growled at him, as man to man. "Can't you see that the French are the best friends you've got? I mean these colonists, who were born and

raised in this country. They love it as much as you do. They have no more use for the French from overseas than we in America had for the English. Some day they, and you, will own this country. They are teaching you how to govern it, and to fight for it, right now. You'll never get anywhere if you don't work with them!"

Criswell growled out this last, as a practical American who knew the art of self-government inside and out. A united country or none, was the lesson America had learned through blood and tears.

The sheik snarled back at him savagely. "Did you work with your own red Indians, American?" he retorted in furious French. "Don't talk to *me!* I know the Roumi! He exterminates! And you think the Day is foolishness? Listen, dog of an infidel! In the year of the grasshoppers it will come. Once in seven years they swarm up from the Sudan, in millions, destroying the crops of the Roumi. All the soldiers are sent out to fight them—and they leave their rifles in the *casernes*. Then strike we! We set fire to the forests, so that yet more soldiers will be called out from the garrisons. Then rise the Arabs, all over North Africa! Then seize we the arms left in the barracks, the government, the big cities! All is prepared! We know how to govern, how to fight, now! Once more the Arab will rule in his own country!"

THE American was dumfounded. He had had no idea of this plotting going on under the very noses of the French colonists. And it seemed hopeless even to think of reconciling them. Hosain was *not* a sporadic fanatic. He represented a whole class, the former ruling class, the great Arab families who had governed the country in the days of Abd el Kader. And they were all in league, hating alike both French and colonists, under their seemingly acquiescent exterior.

"Mektoub!" ("It is written!") said Hosain with a grim smile. "It will come, the Day! The Honor of the Desert has written for us that one word, *Mektoub!* Remember that, as your last thought here, Roumi!" Again he turned to the monument. "But one, O Grandfather!" he said in Arabic. "I had hoped for many. But the honor of the desert is awake, and soon strikes the hour of deliverance! Patience!"

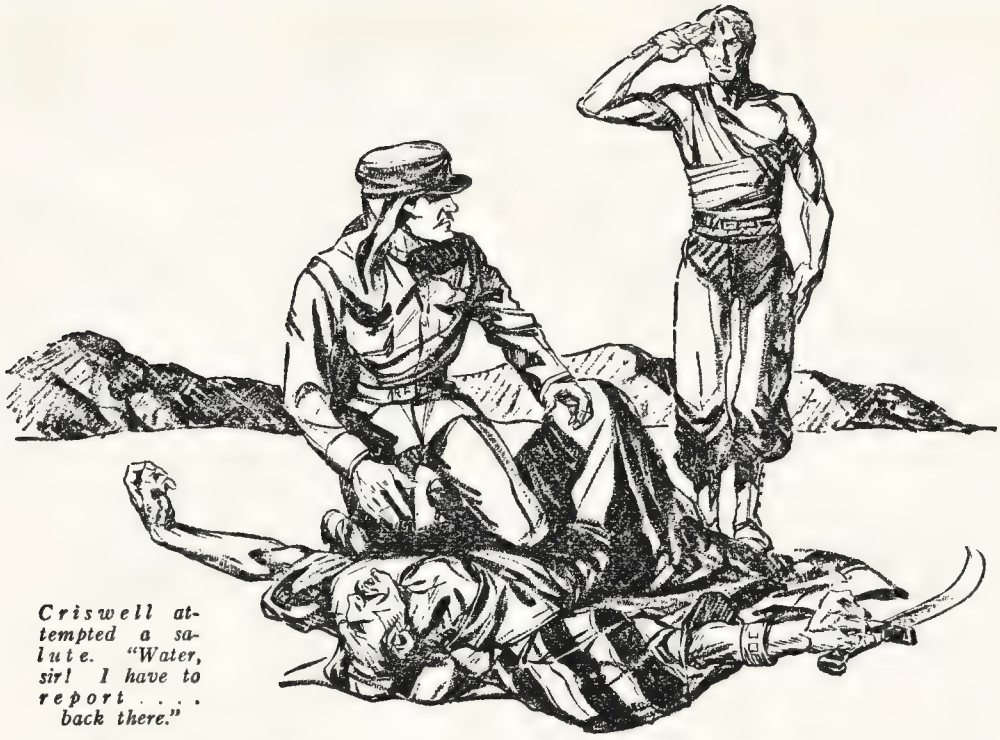
Hosain turned about, cut Criswell's thongs with one stroke of his knife, and waved a hand toward the Monument. The gesture indicated that he was to be left to his fate here, to die of thirst, one more victim of an unceasing hate. The Arab had not changed. Hortet was right. Trust them, never! Only long years of kindly but firm rule would bring about the change, generation by generation. Until then the Government was foolish in putting too much power into their hands.

CRISWELL got up, boiling inwardly with exasperated wrath. It was all foolishness, this! The white man was fundamentally and eternally right. He alone possessed the stable character that brought peace and order and development—by an instinct toward unity above all things. Couldn't Hosain see enough anarchy and intertribal war all around him, down here where French rule was not yet established, not to realize that the Arab would *never* get along, even with himself? Their whole history was one long record of civil wars between rival sultans. Abd el Kader had been the sole shining example of the one emir of them all able to achieve even a semblance of nationalism. And when men persisted in working for disunion, the only remedy was force. Here and *now!* Criswell was the one Aryan present, but as usual the one man with any sound, practical common-sense.

He took two strides toward the monument—then made a sudden leap sidewise, and his fist smote the beard of that ruffian squatting with his rifle across his knees and knocked him flat on the sands. Criswell snatched the rifle in mid-air and whirled with it upon Hosain.

"Don't any of you make a move!" he gritted savagely, leaping back with the weapon poised at his hip.

There was a simultaneous yell of *"Yallah!"* as the five Arabs found the tables so suddenly turned upon them by this one Roumi. Then a deathly and tense silence, each man of them standing motionless in his tracks. The sheik's dark eyes drooped languidly upon Criswell. It meant murder, that look. Criswell was familiar with it, and his heart pounded like a trip-hammer as he took another cautious step backward. One man against five, even though that one was armed with a repeating rifle, yet it was a position of extreme danger. The carbines of the gang were all in their saddle-scabbards and inaccessible, but that did not comfort Criswell much.



Criswell attempted a salute. "Water, sir! I have to report . . . back there."

He had but one effective shot; then his fists and the barrel of the rifle. And they had—knives. Criswell knew the Arab knife, a five-inch blade, sharp as a razor, and always dangling in its red leather sheath from the girdle under the burnouse. They had hands on theirs now.

"Wallah!" laughed the sheik. "To what end, ya Roumi?"

Criswell took another step backward, increasing his precious distance. One of them slid a sandal stealthily forward through the sand. The rifle-muzzle swung imperceptibly his way and stopped that.

Criswell cleared his throat: "You've said all you are going to say, Hosain ben Denib, ben Abd el Kader!" he said sternly. "My business is to hand you over, alive or dead, to Commandant Knecht! Tell your men that the first one of them makes a move, *you'll* get this cartridge!"

HOSAIN blinked sleepily. "Will you let my men go if I yield myself peaceably?"

Criswell stepped back another pace and laughed harshly at that naïvely treacherous suggestion. "None of them!" he said shortly. He had ten feet of distance now, and a possible second shot.

"But consider, ya Sidi," said Hosain suavely. "We are alone in the central Sahara. No one, save wandering Tuareg, has visited this monument since it was built. We can but all die here of thirst, for in truth none of us will move a step, threaten as you will with your rifle."

"So be it!" retorted Criswell briefly. He ventured another backward step and was relieved that it did not precipitate any action. Indeed the East and the West were met here, the latter positive and energetic, the former never taking action unless convinced of the surety of success. They would do nothing—but wait—at present, for the odds were now strongly in Criswell's favor.

But Hosain was no fool. He had powerful allies, the sun and the desert thirst. Soon this mad Roumi would have to *do* something. He could not stand there forever holding that rifle! And at the game of waiting the East was master. There would be an opportunity—*inshallah!*

"Content!" he said in French and fell watchfully silent.

Criswell had time to do some thinking too. The rifle was growing heavy in his hands. He was weaker than he had realized; also he would be thirsty again in less than an hour. He had captured the lot of them—for the time being; but it was an awkward sort of jail. What could he *do* with them? Where go? Nowhere!

His first definite thought was to conserve his strength. He made a few rapid steps

backward and sat down on a rock about twenty feet off.

"Sit down, all of you!" he commanded.

No one moved.

"All right. Stand up, then! When you get tired—" A cheerful wave of the trigger hand told them that the next move was up to the sheik.

HIGHER and higher rose the sun. An oven-hot sirocco got up and blew steadily from the broiling wastes of the Djouf. Criswell found himself licking dry lips and aching for a drink. His prisoners remained stubbornly motionless, enduring.

Half an hour. A giddy spell, that swirled through his brain something like an electric shock, warned Criswell that that was what they were waiting for—for him to keel over. Then the keen knife would be the last thing he knew. Must do something about it.

He looked over at the horses. They had gone to sleep. On them were those leather *guerbas* full of water. Could he risk circling over there? Might tip the scales beyond the last ounce of passivity, Criswell decided. Men went mad at the sight of water, did not care what they did. Better off as things were. . . . .

But the sun and the heat would not let him rest with that long. He *must* have water, and right soon, he discovered, or else become faint and giddy and lethargic. Already that thirst-lethargy was enveloping him, relaxing his vigilance. Before his eyes he saw one of those standing Arabs swirl off in a wave of heat and become invisible for a moment. Then he was back again, standing there on the sand. Criswell knew it for the same mirage effect that he had seen over his rifle-sights in the hot sun. Also it was a warning. His eyes were going crazy. Time to move for that water, cost what it might!

He gave a last stare out over the desert to the west before rising—and experienced a shock that was most unpleasant, for it accused him of incipient lunacy! There was a mirage out there, or something; for a dot now jutted up on the bare horizon-rim that had not been there before. Criswell steadied himself, for the thing did not vanish, but remained part of the scenery. He hardly dared hoped it, but that *might* be Sergeant Ike's Légion column coming! Anyway it was headed straight for the monument; it did not swerve either to north or south. Also the Arabs were not aware of it, Criswell noted with growing heart. Their hooded burnouses were all steadily turned on him, waiting. None of them had moved. No matter how much they were suffering, they were all still on the alert, ready to spring with drawn knives the moment he showed the least sign of relaxed vigilance or thirst weakness.

Criswell looked craftily at intervals, beyond them to that distant dot. How far out was it? Not less than seven miles, to be visible at all. He had about half an hour to wait.

FOR perhaps ten minutes longer he sat fast, buoyed up by the hope and the certainty that a rescue was at hand. Then came lethargy again, deadly, implacable. Exasperating! So near, and yet so far! They would murder him, at this rate, in plain sight of Ike and his comrades. Criswell released an arm to steady himself. The sand his palms touched was red-hot and he drew it back again.

And then the sheik complicated matters, for he gave a peculiar whistle, and his horse, a magnificent stallion of the Hamdani strain, awoke and raised his head and looked over at him. The whistle was repeated. The horse scrambled to his feet and commenced to walk toward his master.

Criswell saw through that game instantly. It was to make the horse pass in front of them, shielding at least the sheik. And anyhow it would precipitate action, give a chance for a rush upon him. Also the horse was bringing them water. He hated to shoot the fine beast down—one precious shot wasted and ten feet of distance at least gone before he could reload—but it had to be done, at once.

He jumped to his feet, and, "Stop that horse!" he yelled, his rifle full on Hosain.

The sheik raised an arm. Hamdani paused, his ears pricked forward inquiringly. He wanted a drink too. Already his body covered two of them—and then there were shouts of, *"Ooosh! Uddrr!"*—and all the horses sprang to their feet.

THE devil had broken loose now, thought Criswell grimly, as he braced himself to shoot and shoot fast. Men and horses had exploded into action like a bursting bomb, and there was no stopping anything now! A burnoused figure leaped out from under Hamdani's neck in front of Hosain and received the stab of bullet that was Criswell's last threat upon their leader.

Fiercely he worked the bolt and pulled trigger in desperation into a solid mass of men and horses leaping for him, then was fending off assailants with jabs of his hot barrel. Knives gleamed in the hot sunlight. Criswell jumped back and back before them, dodging hoofs, buckling out from under the confusion of yelling Arabs and neighing horses, thrusting, warding, always back and back until he felt the stonework of the monument behind him and knew that he could go no further—but his rear was safe.

Criswell breathed hoarsely, standing off the ring of them with his muzzle. He had a priceless instant to snap back and over that bolt—and was just in time, too, for the sheik had snatched his own carbine from its scabbard and was in the act of loading. The two rifles bellowed as one; then a black arm shot over Criswell's rifle-grip from one side, and the sharp agony of a knife driving home through ribs was his. . . . .

He fell back, staring, gasping hoarsely, against the monument. Then the bearded face grinning diabolically in front of him, its arm swinging again with red knife, seemed suddenly to grow vacant and the man was unaccountably falling. . . . . Criswell's senses grew duller. . . . . The air seemed full of sharp *Zip! Zips!* and there were spalls and showers of stone flying off the monument. Anyway, they were leaving him. He saw horses stumble and fall kicking on the sands, saw men collapse in tumbled heaps of burnouse; saw one man leap his horse to ride away, only to fall, horse and rider together, within thirty feet. And then he knew nothing.

WHEN he came to, Hortet was talking volubly. "Psychology, *mon Commandant,* psychology, she is the word! Said I not they would be at the Monument? I not guess, me—I *know!*"

Criswell opened his eyes and looked up into the concerned ones of Sergeant Ike.

"Hey, fellers! He's comin' round!" Ike lifted up his voice in a joyous bellow after one glance. "Gosh-all! Willum Tell hed nothin' on me, gittin' that bozo what was at you! Eight hundred yards, 'twas, Jim!" he told Criswell. "Knecht says it aint mortal," he added in a kind of growly whisper under the general rejoicing. "Ye got a tetch of lung, though."

Criswell smiled feebly. There was a strong smell of spirits about. His blouse had been opened and his side bandaged, but it was all one universal dull ache down there. He tried to speak and found that it hurt him sharply.

"Shet you' damn mouth, you!" said Ike with rough tenderness. "Listen, waddy, 'twell I harangues some. I hed orders fer this coon's arrest, savvy—jes' as soon as the old man found out what they hed been tryin' to do ter us! Was comin' with it when they busts out over you an' takes you along. So we-all hops our mounts, but they got away in that durned *hammada.* An' then Hortet springs his spiel about the monument, to the old man. He figgers the coon was aimin' to lead the hull command thar, bein' grandson of this Abby de Kader feller—an' failin' that, would leave you there so we'd come fer you an' the Desert'd git us. Waal, you know what store Knecht sets by Hortet's jedgment! Our on'y trouble was water, but the boys says: 'Go git our damn Yank, an' we'll go without.' So we took nigh all thar was an' came."

CRISWELL was listening with pleasurable emotions. Loyalty! There you had it, the fundamental motive of the Aryan race! "The boys" would cheerfully go dry if there was the least chance of rescuing him, their comrade. He noted the worried look in Commandant Knecht's eyes and knew that it was for his command, his *"enfants."* For Criswell they had given up the last chance of getting out of this; but in saving one of his *garçons,* Knecht had left the rest in really desperate case back there. Criswell's heart sang with that feeling of loyal comradeship that bound up the Légion as a band of brothers, and he wanted to talk, but Ike would not let him.

"Over the horizon's a danged good place to hide, bud!" he told Criswell. "We-all lays low, thar, in a dry *oued,* 'twell we seed the coons comin' down off'm that range with you—jest as Hortet said. The rest was waitin', till we got a good chancet to bust in without they kills you fust. An' durned if you didn't clean up three of them yourself!" he added admiringly.

Knecht came over at this juncture. They had been searching the sheik for papers and disposing of the bodies. *"Eh bien, mon brave?"* he inquired cheerfully. Criswell attempted a salute. He loved the commandant, loved all of them, and his heart was bursting with news that would

be a relief to the whole command—his gift in return for that loyalty that had given the last keg of water to assure his rescue. He could see it now, on a led horse.

"Water, sir! I have to report . . . . back there in the range . . . . tons of it . . . . rock tank!" Criswell managed to gasp out, and then went white and faint again.

But he got his reward in the explosion of rabid joy that transformed his excitable commandant. That leader went up in the air like a cannon-cracker. Worry left him like a vanished cloud. He strangled and seemed about to have apoplexy for a moment, then fell all over Criswell with grunts of, *"Mon brave! Notre saveur! Bravo! Ouff!"* and kissed him moistly on both cheeks.

"Eh! Eh! It is the work of the *bon Dieu!"* said Knecht, rising and looking about energetically. "Sergeant Ike, you will ride like one devil and bring up the whole command! This one, he will show us this water, *n'est-ce pas?* He shall be carried. Make a stretcher for him, *mes enfants—oh, le bon Dieu!"*

Criswell smiled feebly. It was good to hear the transports of their fine old man, who had been carrying the sufferings of the whole battalion on his shoulders. And at sunset that night, after the whole command had watered at Criswell's tank, the Légion rode out to the Monument to pay their respects to those zouzous who had died to the last man that civilization might again return to North Africa, vanished since Roman times.

"Attention! Guardez vous! Au drapeau!" commanded Knecht. The Légion flag, with its motto *Honneur et Fidelité,* dipped before the Monument to the Lost Regiment.

It was a simple but impressive ceremony. After it Criswell told Knecht all he had learned from Hosain's harangue about the Day, *El Youm!*

The Commandant shrugged unconcerned shoulders. *"Bah!"* he said. "Foolishness! The Arab, he dreams his hate. He plots, childishly. But it must come, some day, this unity—or—" He laid hand on his sword hilt.

The gesture was significant; for it was France's problem in North Africa in a nutshell.

"Lieutenant Hortet," another thrilling Foreign Legion story by Warren Hastings Miller, will appear in the next, the May, issue.

The Men at the Mill

By BERTRAM ATKEY

THE first of a gayly fantastic but highly adventurous series by the clever author of the "Easy Street Experts" and "Captain Cormorant" stories.

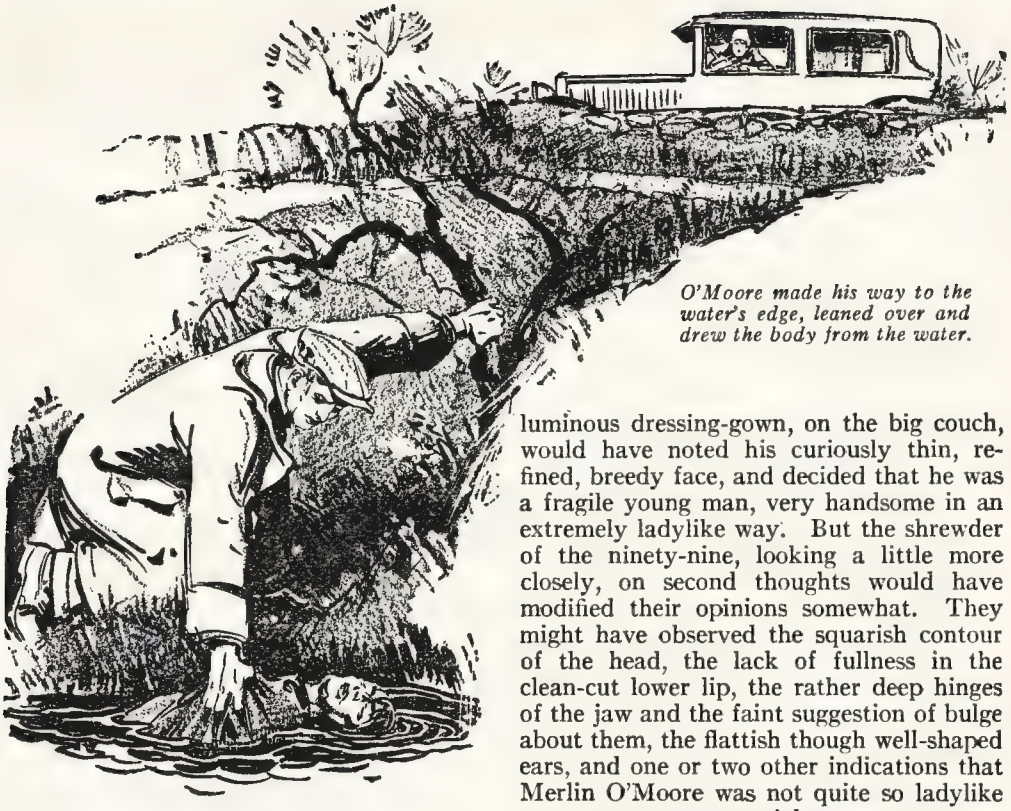
Illustrated by Frank Hoban

IT was an hour short of midnight, and as was usual at that time, the mighty Astoritz, hugest, most comprehensive, luxurious and expensive of all the great West End hotels, was engaged at full pressure upon its everlasting labor of spinning the stuff that dividends are made of. Towering high over the big buildings surrounding it, and blazing with lights, it hummed with talk, laughter and music; the whole of its complex and crowded mechanism, from the gaunt wireless mast at the apex of its roof to the bins of its deep-down cellars, seemed to thrill and vibrate from the fierce activity of the myriad gold-spinners moving upon their task of fulfilling the requirements of the ever-changing crowds.

Of all places, it was the last in which one would expect to find, at that feverish hour, a quiet corner. But even as in the center of the most furious cyclone that ever blew there exists an area of mill-pond calm, so too in the seething Astoritz were many tranquil havens into which the atmosphere of excitement could not penetrate.

Such a haven was the costly first-floor suite of rooms tenanted by Mr. Merlin O'Moore, the bachelor millionaire, who was the bright particular star in the firmament of the chief accountant and other Astoritz officials; his dog Molossus, and his valet Mr. MacBatt.

Outside, above and below the walls of



O'Moore made his way to the water's edge, leaned over and drew the body from the water.

the suite, the incessant drone of activity continued—inside was profound silence.

Outside the luxurious lair of Mr. O'Moore, the place was drenched and flooded with light; inside, at any rate in the room occupied by the millionaire, were only the soft and unflickering glow of a huge electric fire and the steely beams of a brilliant full moon.

Merlin O'Moore was asleep, lying upon a great couch in the moonlight; and Molossus, stretched upon a tiger-skin before the fire, was trying to convince himself that he was asleep.

Mr. O'Moore did not look like a man who had made his millions for himself. Nor had he—they had been inherited. As he lay there sleeping as soundly as a child, he looked "pretty." For he was one of those men with yellow kinky hair, which, cropped short as it was, still curled, and he possessed an astonishing porcelainlike complexion which, had it not been for a hot, pink, feverish-looking flush which at all times lay high up on his cheek-bones and temples, would have made him look like a flapper who has been carefully kept out of the sun. Ninety-nine people out of a hundred, looking down at him lying in his voluminous dressing-gown, on the big couch, would have noted his curiously thin, refined, breedy face, and decided that he was a fragile young man, very handsome in an extremely ladylike way. But the shrewder of the ninety-nine, looking a little more closely, on second thoughts would have modified their opinions somewhat. They might have observed the squarish contour of the head, the lack of fullness in the clean-cut lower lip, the rather deep hinges of the jaw and the faint suggestion of bulge about them, the flattish though well-shaped ears, and one or two other indications that Merlin O'Moore was not quite so ladylike as a cursory survey might suggest.

If they had failed to notice these details, it is possible that the briefest of glances at the canine animal sprawling on the tiger-skin would have assisted them to effect the aforesaid modification of opinion without unduly straining their faculties.

For Molossus was said, and that by competent judges, to be one of the biggest and most typical of the old strain of cropped fighting dogs, known to the French as the *dogue de Bordeaux,* in existence. And he looked it. Certainly he was "some" *chien.* His weight was one hundred and twenty-six pounds, though, on the whole, he looked more. His body color was reddish fawn, and he had a grim, immensely wrinkled red mask, completed by a liver-hued nose. His eyes were very light, and when he opened them, as he did occasionally to look friendlily at Mr. O'Moore, they glinted with a cold and wicked gleam in the moonlight. When he yawned, his face seemed to disappear into his fang-studded crater of a mouth. His teeth were like the things people see in bad dreams. He was, in brief, one of the famous fighting dogs from the Midi—and a monster at that. He was descended, in the direct line, so to speak, from the great Caporal, seven years champion of the Pyrenean district.

The parents of the fierce Molossus—themselves fighting dogs, who at various periods of their careers in single combat had accounted for wolves, hyenas, and had even rattled bears considerably—had passed on their peculiar talents to their son, though with the exception of one contest with a big Russian bear whom he had twice dragged on to its back, he had done very little fighting when he passed into the possession of Merlin O'Moore, who, after some rather exciting weeks of will-contest, had impressed upon him the fact that Mr. O'Moore was the master and Molossus was the man. Having learned respect, affection soon followed, which, the *dogue* being properly treated, soon became devotion. So much for Molossus, inseparable companion of Merlin O'Moore.

AS the tiny clock with the odd hesitant wavering note struck the quarter, O'Moore awoke. Without moving his head, he turned his eyes slightly to gaze slantingly up at a great silver moon that seemed to hang as it were by an invisible thread from the upper frame of one of the big windows. Then, slowly, in a languid, rather musical voice, he spoke.

"The old mill-pond," he said, oddly; "it would look like a sheet of molten silver tonight. I've been dreaming of it, Molo."

The great dog rose, went over, and rested a heavy jowl on Merlin's arm.

"I dreamed I went fishing there and caught a giant pale-green trout with stars instead of spots upon it, and little silver moons for eyes. It fought bitterly before I could bring it to the net, and churned the millpond into a lake of cold moon-fire—whatever that is. Do *you* know, *dogue?* I don't."

Molo thundered faintly somewhere deep down past his gullet.

"Let's go fishing there tonight," continued Merlin dreamily. "I haven't seen the pond for years. And I don't particularly wish to see it tonight, but with a moon like this one must do something. Ring for MacBatt!"

The fighting dog, trained to the trick, turned and obediently lumbered over to the bell-push, against which he pressed his massive head.

Almost instantly the door opened again, and a shadowy figure passed into the room and came up to the couch.

"Is Miss Brown in the hotel tonight?" inquired Merlin.

"She is having supper in the Mediæval Hall, sir. She is not alone. She is accompanied by Captain Warden, of the 30th Hussars, quartered at Hounslow. They are having a very light supper. Miss Brown told Henri, the head waiter, that she was not hungry tonight. She is having a cup of bouillon. Captain Warden is taking *creme de menthe* only."

The precise, extremely detailed answers flowed from the shadowy figure in low smooth tones, of not unpleasing timbre, but as utterly and completely expressionless as the drip of water from a tap not completely turned off.

"Present my compliments to her and say I am going fishing and should be charmed if she cared to come!" said Merlin.

"Very good, sir."

The shadowy one swiftly and quietly produced from a dim corner a little Moorish table, upon which was a dish of peaches, a flask of wine and a gold box of cigarettes, placed it by the side of the couch, and turned to go. But Merlin stayed him.

"Trout fishing, MacBatt. See that everything necessary is put in the car."

"Very good, sir. I understand—trout-fishing, sir," said the shadow. The smooth, precise, deferential voice of the valet seemed to hold a strange undercurrent remotely suggesting a snarl of savage contempt.

Merlin took a cigarette from the box.

"And—MacBatt!"

"Sir?"

"Don't let us have any more of your idiotic blundering. Don't put guns in the car by mistake. One doesn't shoot fish."

"Certainly not, sir."

"That's all. We shall start at one o'clock."

"Very good, sir."

The shadowy man vanished, and Merlin lighted his cigarette, which he proceeded to smoke in dreamy silence, staring up at the moon.

OUTSIDE, in the lighted corridor, Mr. Fin MacBatt was revealed as a very tall, remarkably thin person of perhaps forty. He was a man of striking appearance, with a head and face which few who saw it ever forgot. He was, of course, clean-shaven, but his hair being jet black and his complexion unusually dark, he was invariably dark-blue about the muzzle. The shape of his perfectly colorless face was odd, for while the cheeks were extraor-

dinarily lean and sunken, the forehead, and indeed the whole upper head, bulged outward, as did the square jaws and chin. The result was that, viewed from almost any angle, but especially from the front, the contour of Mr. MacBatt's head and face, a little exaggerated, would have resembled somewhat that of a champagne cork.

He had light gray-green eyes and a sardonic mouth, though when he was in a good temper, the flinty eyes did not lack a frosty gleam of humor. But it was not there this evening, for Mr. MacBatt was not feeling in a humorous mood. He rarely did during the period when the moon was at its full.

For it was only when the moon was full that Merlin O'Moore, man about town, general all-round sportsman, amateur poet, playwright and musician at all other times, was subject to those fits of wild eccentricity which, among other things, kept the worthy MacBatt as actively "on the jump," as the valet was wont, in his more expansive moments, to phrase it. It made no difference to Fin MacBatt that Merlin O'Moore was a more or less unwilling victim of the uncanny influence of the full moon—none whatever. The Curse of the O'Moores, for so this odd affliction of extreme restlessness under a full moon, which seemed hereditary, like gout (with an occasional skip of a generation), in the O'Moore family, was termed, left Mr. MacBatt cold, uninterested and secretly contemptuous, save in so far as it affected himself.

The fact was that Mr. MacBatt did not want to be valet to Merlin O'Moore. He disliked Merlin thoroughly—or at any rate he thought he did—and the dog Molossus he loathed. Daily he asked himself why he stayed on in the service of Merlin O'Moore—but never could give himself a satisfactory answer. The money was extraordinarily good, of course—but the work was back-breaking, at any rate for seven days, or rather, nights, in the month. During the periods of what Merlin termed his moon-fever, Mr. MacBatt considered that he was worked like a dog. Dimly, MacBatt knew that this was good for him, but quite why it was good for him he had not yet worked out. The illuminating truth toward which the big-headed, lantern-jawed valet was slowly groping was this: Fin MacBatt was a natural "crook," a ready-made wrong 'un. If he had not been valet to Merlin O'Moore, he probably would have been a very successful counterfeiter or forger. And since these are apt to be rather jagged times for forgers or counterfeiters, Mr. MacBatt, very deep down in his mentality, was dimly aware that by sticking to his lucrative employment he was being saved from himself. Let there be no mistake—he did not stick to his situation because he particularly wanted to be saved from his natural jaguar-like instincts; he kept to his post because he was afraid of Merlin O'Moore. Plain scared. He was aware that his employer knew him like a book—Merlin had often told him so.

"You are naturally the Compleat Waster, MacBatt," Merlin would say. "If I got rid of you, you would find yourself in jail in a month, and on the gallows in about a year. I know you hate your work, but it is what the Americans call your one best bet. So you had better stick to it. It's your cyclone cellar. Besides, you suit me. I don't know what I should do without you. You have brains when you choose to use them. If you were to bolt, I think I should devote the rest of my life and all my means to hunting you down. It would be amusing—and all for your own good."

And that was true. It sounded true, and Fin MacBatt believed it. For, among his other accomplishments, Merlin O'Moore, in spite of his deceptive appearance, was a Tamer. He tamed things—including men and women—naturally. Usually he did not know he was doing so—when he did know, he enjoyed it and took an interest in it—as in the case of Molossus and of Fin MacBatt.

THERE are a few men like this—tamers; we should be richer if we had more. They are to be found in all walks of life—sparsely distributed, like currants in a hot-cross bun. You find one, here and there, in the army, or the navy; another, perhaps, acting as managing director of big concerns; another, as a big surgeon or physician; another building railways; and so on. It does not really matter much what they do—it is what they are. Tamers—quite pleasant gentlemen, as a rule, until you butt up against them and evince symptoms of requiring to be tamed. Then they tame you. It is very simple. They are natural tamers—they will continue to be tamers even after they have crossed the Styx—they will probably tame Charon *en route,* just to keep in form. Such was

Merlin O'Moore—and that was why Fin MacBatt, who feared practically nobody else on earth, feared him and continued against his own wishes to act as his valet.

Listen to the muttered soliloquy of the tall, lean, big-headed valet as he slides along the corridors and down a stairway towards the Mediæval Hall of the Astoritz in search of Miss Brown.

"He thinks I'm a juggler. Thinks I can conjure trout-rods and reels and flies out of the air. 'See that they're in the car by one o'clock,' he says. How am I going to find his girl, get to Oxford Circus, look up his blasted fishing tackle, ring up the garage, get out his clothes, dress him, fill his flask, and get him and Blackberry Brown off by one o'clock? How?" Mr. MacBatt shook his fist at the great moon visible through a window he was passing. "You—it's you, you baldfaced baldheaded fool-maker!" he snarled softly. "Why don't you leave the man alone—and give me a chance?"

Fuming, the valet shot swiftly down the stairs, threaded his way quickly along a mazily turning service corridor, and sent in a message to Henri, the head waiter of the Mediæval Hall.

HENRI—a personal friend of Mr. MacBatt's—took the message for Miss Brown, and the snarling valet darted out into the street, hailed a taxi and had himself rapidly driven to a huge departmental store near Oxford Circus. Merlin O'Moore was so very much more than the controlling shareholder in the concern that he was practically the owner of it. At any rate, he used it as a storeroom. He possessed a master-key so that anything he chanced to require when the place was closed, he took, or sent Fin MacBatt to take, merely leaving an order, signed by MacBatt and initialed by himself, with the watchman.

It was very convenient.

Pausing for an instant to pass the time of night with the watchman, the valet hurried to the sports department, and working like a madman, selected two beautiful trout-rods, reels, lines, flies and landing net, left the filled-in order, and swearing liberally, fled back to the waiting taxi.

He ripped off the labels of the things and checked the tackle (luckily he had found reels already fitted with lines) as he went. At the private side door to Merlin's suite—the Astoritz is nothing if not comprehensive—a gigantic silvery-gray touring car was waiting with one of the hotel garage men in charge. Mr. MacBatt stowed the rods and things away in the hood and tore upstairs. It was twenty minutes to one.

"Might as well spend my life catching trains!" he hissed bitterly, as he went.

MISS BROWN, it seemed, had already arrived.

She was sitting by the fire with Molossus, enjoying a peach or so, when Mr. MacBatt, flushed as it is possible for a man with a dark blue face to be, entered to acquaint his master that the rods and car were ready.

"Your master is waiting for you," said Miss Brown calmly, biting into her second peach. "I think he is in a hurry."

The valet disappeared, *en route* for Merlin's bedroom.

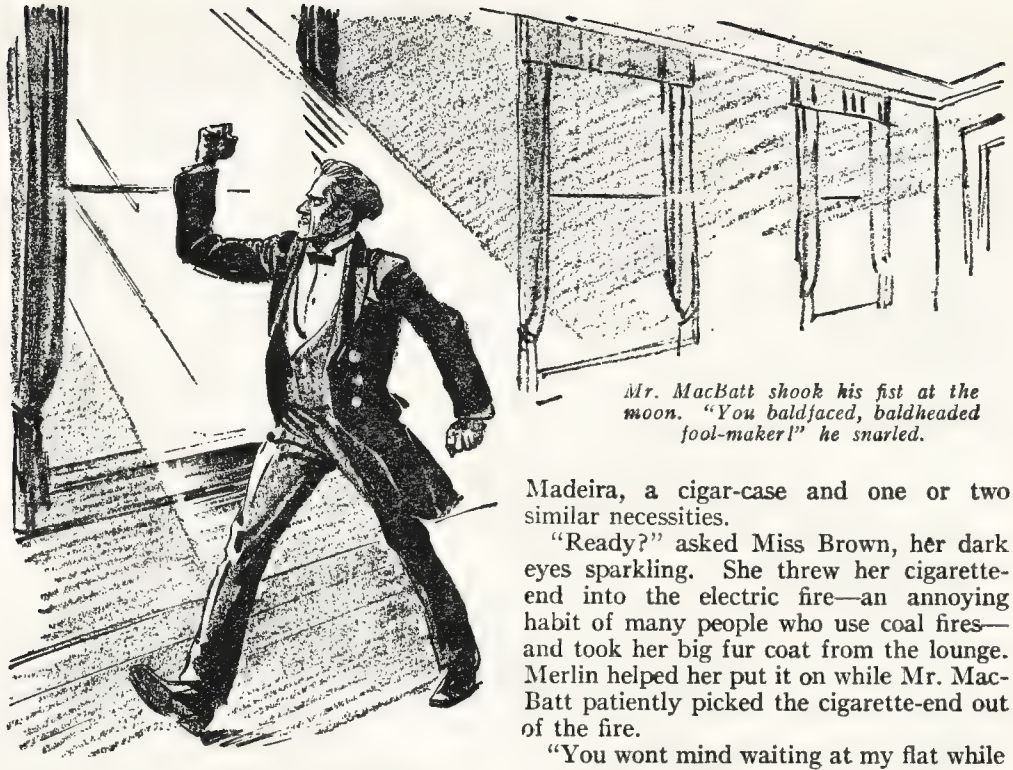
"Hurry! How about *me?*" he snarled.

But Miss Brown did not hear him. She would not have cared if she had. It was no affair of hers. One of her instinctive rules of life was to leave other people's servants alone.

"MacBatt seems to be worried, Molo," she said to the *dogue.*

But Molossus only lifted his lips in a grin of sour contempt. He and MacBatt disliked each other intensely. Neither was in the least afraid of the other, though both were disdainful. Mr. MacBatt would have flogged the hide off the fighter from the Midi if he could have found an excuse and if Merlin had permitted it; while Molossus, for his part, would gladly have bitten the legs off Fin MacBatt, if Merlin had allowed such extravagances on the part of any *dogue* of his. Jealousy, probably, was at the root of this dislike—though MacBatt, at any rate, would have been a staggered man if anyone had suggested that he could be jealous on account of Merlin O'Moore.

Miss Brown reached for a cigarette, lighted it, strolled across the room and surveyed herself with lazy admiration in a long mirror upon the wall. The admiration was not misplaced, for she was one of the prettiest brunettes in London. She was, indeed, none other than *the* Blackberry Brown, the famous white-black comédienne, whose coon flapper representations will be forever remembered—by those who remember that sort of thing. She had innumerable admirers and, what was probably of far more use to her, a "drawing power" which made her worth a rousing



Mr. MacBatt shook his fist at the moon. "You baldfaced, baldheaded fool-maker!" he snarled.

salary to any theater or music-hall proprietor who could get her. On the whole she worked hard—when she felt inclined. She and Merlin O'Moore were close friends, though Merlin did not admire her coon flapper representations any more than she admired Merlin's verse. They had one great bond—Blackberry Brown was the only other person Merlin O'Moore knew who was affected by the full moon in the same way as he was. They had met in adventurous circumstances (as may, in due course, be related), and since then had shared many full-moon adventures. Such, briefly, was the young lady who, having finished Merlin's peaches, was innocently engaged in admiring herself, in order pleasantly to while away the time of waiting.

SHE did not have long to wait. Spurred by one or two of the barbed sarcasms which he hated so much, MacBatt turned out his lord and master with exceeding swiftness, and Blackberry Brown had hardly made up her mind whether she looked better with a cigarette in her right hand or in her left, when the door opened and Merlin, now clad in a comfortable brown tweed suit and brown boots, strolled quietly in, followed by the big-headed MacBatt, carrying a huge fur-lined coat, a motor cap, gloves, a flask of rare old Madeira, a cigar-case and one or two similar necessities.

"Ready?" asked Miss Brown, her dark eyes sparkling. She threw her cigarette-end into the electric fire—an annoying habit of many people who use coal fires—and took her big fur coat from the lounge. Merlin helped her put it on while Mr. MacBatt patiently picked the cigarette-end out of the fire.

"You wont mind waiting at my flat while I pop in and change, will you?" asked Blackberry as Merlin slipped into his coat and gloves. "Are we taking little Molo?"

The big red-masked monster caused his body to writhe massively and gaped pleadingly at his master.

"He can come—unless Fin wants some one to stay at home with him?" said Merlin with languid humor.

"No, thank you, sir—not at all, sir," said MacBatt hastily, letting a grim flickering glance of contempt out of the corner of his eye at Molossus.

"Very well, then. Come along, Molo. Are you ready, Blackberry? Good. Grand moon, isn't it?"

Affectionately slipping his arm through his charming little friend's, Merlin made for the door.

"You needn't come down, Fin, my man," he said good-naturedly. "But have some chocolate ready for us when we get back."

"Very good, sir. At what time do you wish it, sir?" inquired MacBatt.

Merlin turned, raising his eyebrows.

"My good MacBatt, how on earth do you expect me to know at what time we shall get back?" he inquired in a tone of weary protest, and with Miss Brown and Molo left the room.

MacBatt gulped noisily with rage, flushing a bluish flush.

"That's it! Full-moon time, this is, not half it isn't. 'Have chocolate ready when we get back'—and don't know within six hours when he'll be back," he snarled softly, and helped himself to a cigarette from the gold box.

"Full moon—and overflowing," he repeated bitterly, pouring himself a green Chartreuse and settling down on the lounge recently occupied by his master.

"Him and Blackberry gadding about in the moonlight trout-fishing at one o'clock at night! *Puh!*"

He refilled his glass, and presumably feeling chilly, went to Merlin's dressing-room, from which he returned arrayed in Merlin's dressing-gown. He settled down again, yawning.

"Who studies *me?*" he demanded.

"Nobody!" he replied. "Little Blackberry aint so bad—but she's too fond of Blackberry. She only thinks of her own comfort. She might have left one of the peaches. . . . . Still, she aint bad. Pretty little thing, too."

Outside, a motor-alarm bellowed furiously—a receding note. That was Merlin O'Moore hooting as he turned the corner. Mr. MacBatt recognized it.

"That's it—hoot!" he said drowsily, his legs crossed, watching the lazy smoke of his cigarette. "Hoot, you owl—hoot like the devil! Nothing like music!" And he relapsed into reverie.

BUT Merlin O'Moore and Blackberry were not destined to do any trout-fishing in the old mill-pond this moon. They did not know it—nor would they have been seriously distressed if they had. They were out using up the moonlight, and that alone appeared to make them happy. If anything exciting cropped up, all the better.

The big car slid the miles under its wheels with the dreamlike ease and floating smoothness which only a really good car can achieve. The silky purr of its mechanism, the deep, regular drone of its exhaust, the whisper of its broad tires on the dry roads, all merged and blended into an everlasting lullaby for the moon-stricken pair. Blackberry Brown snuggled down in her furs like a dormouse, her bright eyes gazing up at the giant moon.

"Lovely, Merlin," she said contentedly.

"Perfect, little Double B," replied Mr. O'Moore.

"MacBatt thinks we are both mad. Did you see the disgust in his eyes as we went out? He is quite certain we are lunatics."

"Well, aren't we?"

"I don't know. Are you?" inquired Miss Brown.

"I'm going trout-fishing at midnight. And I like the idea—but is it sane?"

The comédienne shrugged her shoulders.

"It's refreshing."

She gazed again upon the moon, presumably for further refreshment.

The church clock was striking two as they glided through a deathly silent village, all silvery in the moonlight, towards the mill-house on the river a quarter of a mile or so below the village. Merlin O'Moore owned the greater part of that village, and the mill-house too, as well as a fine old country house close by, but it was a long time since he had visited it or seen the estate agent that attended to it for him. It was not the only country place he owned, nor was it his favorite.

They turned a bend in the road which now ran along beside the river; and the mill-house, a big place, loomed into sight, towering, as it seemed, on the edge of the sheet of silver which was the pool. He stopped the car for a moment, and switched off the lights, the better to appreciate the really beautiful view.

Then he uttered an exclamation.

"Late birds, there," he said. "See the lights, Double B?"

Half a dozen of the windows of the mill-house were still brightly lighted.

"Does that mean we get no fishing?" inquired Blackberry.

Merlin shook his head.

"Oh, no! I've no doubt Carton, my agent, reserved fishing rights for two rods, in the agreement—but who is the gentleman creeping along under the wall? Do you see him? There—by the edge of the bridge. He's in the shadows now."

The moon-worshipers stared at each other.

"A poacher?" said Blackberry. She too had seen the figure of a man dart across the road into the black shadows thrown by the stone parapet of the bridge they were facing.

But Merlin shook his head.

"A poacher would wait till the people had gone to bed. Listen!"

THERE was the sudden low rushing sound of a powerful motor-engine just started up, and a moment later they saw

The watcher twisted round, sliding the revolver forward. "Who are you? What d'you want?" he asked.

emerge from behind a building which was part of the mill itself, now disused, a big car, heading from the mill-yard to the road.

"Visitors going home, I suppose," said Merlin.

The car disappeared down the road.

"We'll take a closer look at the creeper in the shadows, I think," said Merlin, and was about to slide the car forward, when yet another big motor appeared, coming from the direction in which the first had disappeared. This car turned in at the mill-yard, vanishing behind the building which had screened the first.

"Is it a dance, do you think? I don't believe there's a room in the place big enough for a decent dance," muttered Merlin, puzzled.

Molossus, the *dogue,* in the back of the car, suddenly thrust his grisly head between the shoulders of the couple, and with his throat gave an admirable imitation of distant thunder.

"Shut up, idiot! Who invited you to join in the conversation?" snapped Merlin in an undertone. Then he felt Blackberry's hand close upon his arm. He looked at her, and saw that her eyes were gleaming brilliantly.

"There's something queer—odd—going on, Merlin. I feel it," she whispered. "Back the car a little and we'll explore on foot."

O'Moore had also felt it, and like the girl, did not propose to ignore it. They had long ago discovered that one of the quite inexplicable advantages of their moon-affliction during its period was that their instincts, their natural perceptions, were strangely sharpened. They were more sensitive to the unseen—more able to sense, as it were, things latent, or imminent. It was partly because of this phenomenon that Merlin O'Moore could drive his big car over miles of moonlit roads at the pace he did, without accident.

He nodded, and was silently engaging his reverse gear, when Blackberry started slightly.

"Look!" she said, very low, pointing down to the water close by them at the tail of the mill-pool.

O'Moore's eyes, following the pointing finger, fell upon the face of a man—of a body that lay half-stranded, upon its back, the white face of a dead man—gazing, as it were, still and mute, up at the moon.

"Stay here, Blackberry," he said. "I'll go and make sure—though there's not much doubt about it. On guard, Molo!"

HE slipped out of the car, vaulted the low railing which was the continuation of the bridge parapet, and made his way to the water's edge.

There was, as he had said, no doubt

about it. He leaned over and drew the body from the water. It was fully clothed —and in the uniform of the rural constabulary.

O'Moore looked at the dead man, frowning thoughtfully, for a moment; then struck by something in its appearance, he groped for and found under the soaked tunic the man's watch.

It had stopped at one o'clock.

"If he was drowned tonight," reflected O'Moore, "it has happened within the last hour."

There was nothing more he could do then for the dead constable, and he hastened back to the car.

"It is the local policeman, Double B," he said quietly. "And I fancy he was alive an hour ago. There is something pretty bad going on. Have you seen the creeper again?"

"No. He is still in the shadow round the corner of the bridge."

MERLIN climbed in and quietly ran the car back to a spot well off the road, and where it could not be seen from the mill.

Then, taking Molossus, they both got down and went forward.

They crept silently across the bridge toward the patch of shadow into which the unknown watcher had vanished. Molossus, his collar in O'Moore's grip, went with them. They kept close in to the parapet, their feet making no noise upon the dust collected at the side of the road. So when in a moment they edged round the slight curve of the wall, and came full upon the "creeper," they surprised him completely. He was crouching close in under the wall, craning forward in the attitude of strained attention. One hand rested on the ground keeping him balanced, and the other held a revolver, which Merlin saw was fully cocked and obviously, therefore, loaded.

The watcher, his every faculty rapt and absorbed, heard nothing of their approach until Molossus' collar, wrung to strangling point by Merlin in order to hold the big beast, choked a snuffling protest from the straining *dogue*.

Then the man turned like a startled cat. He glared up over his shoulder, his face within a foot of the bristling fangs and grinning jaws of the fighting dog. He recoiled a little.

Now they were round the curve of the wall, the light was better—they had passed through the belt of shadow—and they saw that the watcher was a thin, white-faced, keen-looking youngish man, wearing a loose tweed overcoat and a soft slouch hat. He twisted round, still crouching, sliding the revolver forward. His eyes played swiftly over them.

"Who are you? What d'you want?" he asked softly, but with menace in his voice.

O'Moore replied as softly:

"A word with you. What are you doing, and why are you watching this place?"

The man's attitude relaxed slightly as Merlin spoke.

"Why—you're O'Moore, the millionaire —from the Astoritz?" he said. "I interviewed you a couple of months ago! Look here—go back over the bridge and I'll follow you and explain. Quick, though. I'm glad you're here—also your beast, though he's not pretty. It's all right," he added, noting Merlin's hesitation. "I'm a newspaper man—on private affairs—in need of reinforcements."

They backed quietly off the bridge again, the watcher following them.

"My God, how you startled me!" said the man, when a moment or two later they were screened from the view of anyone looking from the mill-house. "Do you, too, know what is going on here, or is it just luck that you appeared on the scene?" He was looking closely at Blackberry Brown as he spoke, and without pausing for a reply he continued:

"Why, Blackberry Brown! You too! How are you, Miss Brown? We know each other, I think—I'm Bill Guest—Daily *Nail*."

"You seem to know everybody," said Merlin, surprised, as Blackberry acknowledged their acquaintanceship.

"I do—worth knowing," replied Mr. Bill Guest. "Are you here by chance?"

"Yes—quite. Just having a moonlight run."

"Well, you've come at a useful time. Do you know what is going on here? You're the owner of this place, I think. Do you know anything about your tenants?"

"Nothing. What is wrong?"

"Your sweet tenants, Mr. O'Moore, are counterfeiters. I'm not here officially, though. I stumbled on it; the fact is," —Mr. Guest's voice hardened,—"I believe they've got my girl concealed somewhere in there—a prisoner. That's why I'm here. I'm planning to explore the place, and I'll be glad of your company!"

Merlin O'Moore nodded.

"We're with you. How many of the murderers are there?"

"Oh, about four, living here," Guest glanced quickly at Merlin. "Why do you say murderers?"

"I've just taken the body of a policeman out of the water," said Merlin, pointing. Guest muttered something under his breath, and slipped over the railing, down to the place where the body lay. He was back almost at once.

"I believe you're right about the murder," he said, and his face was very pale in the moonlight. "That is the constable of this village and I happen to know that he was alive at eleven o'clock. And I know, too, that he had expressed his intention of keeping an eye on this place. He told Miss Graham so. Miss Graham is my *fiancée*, the daughter of the doctor here—and she has been missing for the last two days. She came fishing near here—and never returned. Her rod and creel were found this morning some way down the river. Everyone thinks she is drowned, but I believe she stumbled on the secret of these scoundrels in some way, and was trapped before she could get away. I don't think they would risk killing her." He broke off, staring toward the mill.

They saw a second motor glide away down the road, and a moment later the lights in the windows of the mill-house began to go out, one by one.

"That looks as though there will be no more visitors tonight," said Merlin O'Moore, and the other nodded.

"We'll give them time to settle down," he said. "It's rather a pity we are only two—"

"Four," corrected Blackberry Brown; "you haven't counted Molossus and me."

Each went for a grip, and one got it—Molossus' fearful jaws closed on the throat of the Great Dane.

Guest nodded. "They've got a Great Dane there that will keep your dog busy," he said.

Merlin O'Moore laughed softly.

"Molo eats them alive," he observed. "You'll see. But I don't think you ought to be in this, Double B. There might be bad trouble."

"There will be," said the newspaper man, flatly; "but if Miss Brown cared to run back to the village in your car and bring along Dr. Graham and two men I know there, it would make it a certainty for us."

The girl was in the car before he had finished speaking.

"Where are they to be found?" she asked. And Guest having given her directions, the big car stole silently away.

Guest turned.

"You armed?" he asked.

Merlin showed a big steel wrench to which he had assisted himself from the car.

"Am I?" he asked, smiling.

"You are," replied Bill Guest. "God help the crook that gets that in the hair!"

"We may as well be getting on, then," suggested Merlin, and once more they stole into the shadows.

AS they moved close up to the house, they saw the last of the lights on the ground floor vanish, and listening at the window, they distinguished the sound of a heavy tread receding from the room in which the light had been extinguished.

"They've finished for tonight," muttered Guest.

But O'Moore did not answer. He was looking over his shoulder toward a corner of the house beyond which something invisible was moving. Molossus, too, was watching, writhing in O'Moore's grip.

Then suddenly there came swinging into the moonlight a mighty, pied dog—a harlequin Great Dane. He saw them instantly, and for a second stood stock still and rigid with surprise — a noble beast, taller, heavier and far handsomer than Molossus.

And he did not lack courage. He dropped his head a little and with a terrifying growl charged them—just as Merlin released the fighter from the Midi. Molossus trotted forward a few paces, snarling —a queer blood-curdling contented sort of sound—and they met open-jawed. They did not skirmish nor indulge in any side-stepping. Each went straightforwardly for a grip, and one got it—Molossus. The Great Dane's fangs chopped through a mouthful of the mass of loose, wrinkled skin with which the skull, throat and upper neck of the fighting dog was covered; but Molossus' fearful jaws closed on the big throat of the Great Dane. Nothing but hot irons would have undone that grip, and the big boarhound appeared to realize it. He went down snarling, but Molossus was mute as death, driving his fangs deeper and deeper in toward the great jugular.

A door flew open and a man rushed out—a big burly man, who carried a loaded cane.

"Hah! Thieves, eh?" he shouted, and swung the cane for Guest's head in vicious earnest. The journalist ducked like lightning, and the weapon whizzed over his head with an inch to spare.

Then Merlin O'Moore's spanner, thrust forward with a jabbing movement, crashed on to the counterfeiter's mouth and teeth. Had the heavy tool been swung it would have smashed his head. As it was, he went down with a yelp, writhing.

They left him to writhe and pressed into the house. A man jumped at them as they entered but staggered back, dazed by a blow from Guest's revolver-butt.

Then a sudden blaze of electric light flooded the hall, and a third man, standing halfway up the stairs fired deliberately at them. There was a sharp report, and Guest's left arm fell to his side. It was the man's only shot, for the next second the flying spanner, flung with all O'Moore's force, took him full on the side of the head, stunning him, so that he pitched in a limp heap to the bottom of the stairs.

"Good shot!" gasped Guest. "There should be only one left."

As he spoke, the screams of a woman from overhead, muffled, but not far away, rang out.

"Upstairs," said Merlin, and stepping over the man at the foot of the stairs, ran up to the next floor, followed by Guest.

Guided by the screams, they raced down a passage. The door of the room from which the cries issued was locked, but they burst it open after risking a shot into the lock. A girl was standing inside, well clear of the door, awaiting them.

"Kath!" cried Guest.

"Billy, I knew you'd come!" she said.

NOW the sound of a window sliding up drew O'Moore from the room, and he saw, at the end of the passage, a man scrambling up on to the windowsill. He was a fraction of a second too late to catch him—even as he reached for him, the man dived from the window. Craning out, O'Moore saw him strike the water that came close up under the house, where it joined the mill. But he did not see the diver come to the surface—though the water was as plain to be seen in the moonlight as by day.

He waited an instant and then went back to Guest and the girl. They seemed completely to have forgotten everything but themselves, and she was engaged in stanching the blood from the journalist's wounded arm.

"I think it is a pretty complete rout for the enemy," said Merlin cheerfully. "Hadn't you better come downstairs? I thought I heard the car hooter a moment ago."

So they went downstairs.

The car had returned—with reinforcements, mainly uniformed in pajamas. Two of the captives were conscious and sat in

chairs in the hall guarded by two big capable-looking young sportsmen who proved to be sons of the local vicar, greatly enjoying themselves.

The man winged by Merlin on the stairs was lying on a couch, with Miss "Kath's" father, the doctor, examining him.

"The skull is *not* fractured," he was announcing to Blackberry Brown as the others entered, "though it was a near thing—a very near thing, indeed—why, Kath, my dear girl! Kathy!"

He took the girl affectionately in his arms. "What a fright you have given us!" he added.

"Not my fault, Daddy," she said. "Did you think I was drowned? These brutes said they would see that you did—they were going to smuggle me out of the country, they said. I strolled into the old mill—and saw things they didn't want seen."

"That's all right, Kathy—don't worry—all over now. This lady is going to run you home in the car—to surprise Mother—aren't you, Miss Brown?"

"Certainly," said Blackberry.

"And Billy too—and his broken arm!" said the girl.

"What's that? Let me see." The old doctor needed only a glance. A moment later he, his daughter, and Guest were *en route* for the village.

Molossus entered the hall a moment later. He was not alone. The Great Dane was with him—but it was a dead Great Dane. Molossus carefully dragged the body to Merlin's feet, deposited it there, and lay down beside it, panting slightly, looking like a devil-dog that had done a good day's work—and done it well.

An hour later the police from the nearest town were in charge of the mill, the mill-house and the captives, and perhaps half an hour after that, Merlin O'Moore and Blackberry Brown were rolling homeward through the light of a sinking moon, with Molossus, still licking his incredible jaws, at the back of the car.

"THAT was almost an adventure," said Merlin O'Moore lightly. "Are you tired, Double B?"

She shook her head.

"No, just thinking. Do you think they killed that policeman?"

"No doubt about it—but it will be difficult to prove. That chap who dived into the river killed himself too, hit his head on a boulder. It was a good thing for that pretty little girl Kath that the place was rushed tonight."

"You think they would have got her out of the country?"

Mr. O'Moore shook his head.

"She would have been found a mile or so down the river," he said.

Blackberry Brown stared up at the moon, her face very white.

"It's lucky *you* were at the full tonight," she said quietly, addressing the great orb.

Merlin O'Moore nodded, laughing.

"And tomorrow night—and the night after—and the night after that! We've struck a lucky moon this time, my dear," he said, and let the big car out a few miles more per hour.

THROUGH the Chartreused dreams of the big-headed MacBatt pierced sharply the harsh and clamorous note of an electric horn, and he woke with a start that precipitated him off the couch onto the floor.

"Blast it—here he comes!" snarled the valet, and raced out to his own regions, where, working desperately if dazedly, he prepared the hot chocolate ordered by his employer. As luck would have it, Merlin evidently decided to leave the car at the near-by garage himself, so that when presently he strolled into his rooms, Mr. MacBatt was able to greet him with a tray of steaming chocolate. He had dropped Miss Brown at her flat, and so was alone.

"What's that, MacBatt?"

"Your chocolate, sir!"

"Take it away. What do you mean by thrusting your infernal cocoa at me at this hour of the night? Get the whisky and soda, my man, and try to use your brains!" commanded Merlin forgetfully.

"Very good, sir."

Mr. MacBatt retired, seething.

"That's it—that's done it!" he hissed sourly to himself. "After all that work—falling off the sofa—breaking my neck—he clean forgets he ordered it!"

He shook his fist at the door.

"Tomorrow, you get my notice, my laddie!" he said under his breath. "I'm no slave! I'm handing in my notice to quit tomorrow as sure as green apples!"

But he wasn't.

Another vivid adventure of Merlin O'Moore will be described by Mr. Atkey in the next, the May, issue.

TARZAN, Lord of the Jungle

The Story So Far:

UPON the broad back of Tantor the elephant dozed that strange being Tarzan—English boy who by curious chance had been brought up by the giant apes of Africa, had renounced civilization and become lord of the jungle.

Deadly peril threatened Tarzan: for journeying toward the Abyssinian hinterland came the Arab sheik Ibn Jad, seeking to loot a rumored treasure city; and hunters from this Arab camp spied Tantor lolling in the forest shade.

An Arab hunter fired at Tantor—and missed; but the startled elephant plunged off headlong through the forest; and Tarzan, knocked senseless to the ground by an overhanging limb, was made captive by the Arabs, and was about to be murdered by the Sheik's brother Tollog, when Tantor, returning, snatched the tent from over the unequal combat, hurled Tollog into the jungle, and made off with Tarzan.

And now a new menace threatened the peace of Tarzan's domain. Two American hunters, Blake and Stimbol, had arrived with their safari of negro porters. Because of Stimbol's brutality to the blacks, the two had quarreled, and had decided next day to divide the safari and go their separate ways, Blake with his camera and Stimbol with his wanton rifle.

Tarzan, however, ordered Stimbol back to the coast, but granted Blake permission to continue making camera studies of the wilderness folk. The two Americans next day set forth on their several ways, but Adventure was by no means done with them. For Stimbol, deserted by his blacks, fell into the hands of the Arab raider Ibn Jad. And to Blake came an even more extraordinary experience when, wandering lost and alone in a remote mountainous region, he was halted by two negroes clad in a curious medieval costume, and taken through a tunnel and to a strange castle. A portcullis was lifted—

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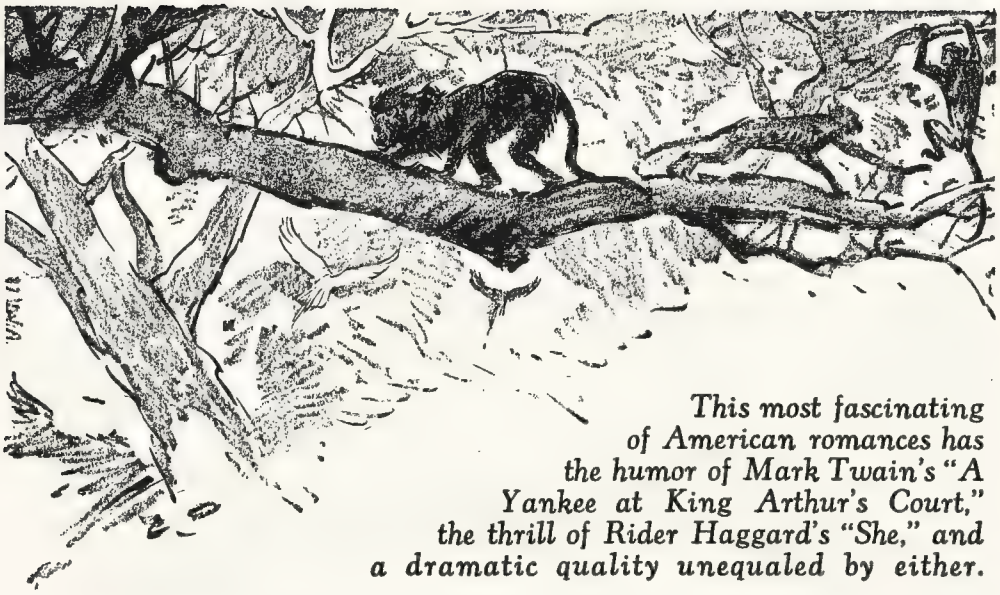


This most fascinating of American romances has the humor of Mark Twain's "A Yankee at King Arthur's Court," the thrill of Rider Haggard's "She," and a dramatic quality unequaled by either.

By EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

and he found himself in the presence of mail-clad knights speaking the English of the Crusades.

For seven hundred years, he learned, the descendants of four wandering shipwrecked companies of English crusaders had maintained themselves in this hidden valley, believing themselves ringed about by the Saracens. They had kept up their ancient manners, customs and speech. And they received Blake as a fellow-countryman, though his speech and allusions were indeed strange to them. They even instructed him in the use of their medieval arms so well that Blake, upon the advice of his special friend the noble young Sir Richard Montmorency, accepted a challenge from Sir Malud, a knight who was jealous of the favor shown Blake by the Princess Guinalda.

Meanwhile Tarzan had rescued from the attack of a lion one Zeyd, a young man of Ibn Jad's party, who had been driven out of it because of the enmity of the powerful Fahd, his rival for Ateja, the Sheik's daughter. Afterward Tarzan made his way to Ibn Jad's camp. And the Sheik compelled Stimbol to attempt Tarzan's murder as the ape-man lay asleep in one of the tents. But Tarzan learned of the plot—and circumvented it in grim fashion: he captured his old enemy Tollog and left him bound and gagged in his own place; and it was Tollog that was stabbed by Stimbol, and buried as Tarzan by the Arabs—while Tarzan himself, trailing his friend Blake, came to the guarded entrance to the Valley of the Sepulcher.

During this time Blake, casting aside his buckler and depending on the point rather than the edge of his sword, won his duel with Sir Malud—and won the hearts of the onlookers by his generosity toward the vanquished. So he was chosen as one of the champions in the Great Tourney, when the knights of the City of Nímmr met the champions of the City of the Sepulcher—for these castaway Englishmen were divided into two none-too-friendly camps.

By a scant margin the knights of Nímmr won the Great Tourney, but the affair ended in deadly earnest, for King Bohun of the City of the Sepulcher, infatuated by Guinalda, captured her by a trick and carried her off, with Blake and the other knights of Nímmr in furious pursuit. . . . . Perhaps Bohun would not have ventured so far had he known that in his absence a raiding party of Ibn Jad's Arabs had gained entrance to his castle and pillaged it! The Saracens had come at last! *(The story continues in detail:)*

TARZAN determined that he could never ascertain the attitude of the negro guards at the entrance to the Valley of the

Sepulcher by lying hidden among the brush, and so he gathered himself, as Numa does when he is about to spring.

The two blacks were idly gossiping, their minds as far from thoughts of danger as it was possible they could be, when suddenly and without warning Tarzan launched himself full upon the back of the nearer, hurling him to the ground; and before the other could gather his wits, the ape-man had dragged his victim into the concealment of the brush from which he had sprung, while the fellow's companion turned and fled in the direction of the tunnel.

The man in Tarzan's grasp fought and struggled to be free, but the ape-man held him as easily as he might have held a child.

"Lie still," he advised; "I shall not harm you."

"Od's blud!" cried the black. "What manner of creature art thou?"

"One who will not harm you if you will tell him the truth," replied Tarzan.

"What wouldst thou know?" demanded the black.

"A white man came this way many weeks ago. Where is he?"

"Thou speakest of Sir James?" asked the soldier.

"Sir James!" mused Tarzan, and then he recollected that Blake's first name was James. "His name was James," he replied, "James Blake."

"Verily, 'tis the same," said the soldier.

"You have seen him? Where is he now?"

"He is defending the honor of Our Lord Jesus and the Knights of Nímmr in the Great Tourney in the lists upon the plain below the city; and have ye come to wreak despite upon our good Sir James, thou wilt find many doughty knights and men-at-arms who will take up the gage in his behalf."

"I am his friend," said Tarzan.

"Then why didst thou leap upon me thus, if thou art a friend of Sir James?" demanded the man.

"I did not know how you had received him or how you would receive me."

"A friend of Sir James will be received well in Nímmr," said the man.

TARZAN took the man's sword from him and permitted him to rise—his pike he had dropped before being dragged among the bushes.

"Go before me and lead me to your master," commanded the ape-man, "and remember that your life will be the forfeit that you must pay for treachery."

"Do not make me leave the road unguarded against the Saracens," begged the man. "Soon my companion will return with others, and then I shall beg them to take thee whither thou wilt."

"Very well," agreed the ape-man, and they had not waited long before he heard the sound of hastening footsteps and a strange jingling and clanking that might have been caused by the shaking of many chains and the striking against them of objects of metal.

SHORTLY afterward he was surprised to see a white man, clothed in chain mail and carrying a sword and buckler, descending the trail at a trot, a dozen pikemen at his back.

"Tell them to halt!" commanded Tarzan, placing the point of the man's sword in the small of his back. "Tell them I would talk with them before they approach too closely."

"Stop, I pray thee!" cried the fellow. "This is a friend of Sir James, but he will run me through with my own sword, an' ye press him too close. Parley with him, most noble sir knight, for I would live at least to know the result of the Great Tourney."

The knight halted a few paces from Tarzan and looked him up and down from feet to head.

"Thou art truly a friend to Sir James?" he demanded.

Tarzan nodded. "I have been seeking him for days."

"And some mishap befell thee and thou lost thy apparel?"

The ape-man smiled. "I go thus, in the jungle," he said.

"Art thou a sir knight and from the same country as Sir James?"

"I am an Englishman," replied Tarzan of the Apes.

"An Englishman! Thrice welcome then to Nímmr! I am Sir Bertram and a good friend to Sir James."

"And I am called Tarzan," said the ape-man.

"And thy rank?" inquired Sir Bertram courteously.

Tarzan was mystified by the strange manners and garb of his seemingly friendly inquisitor, but he sensed that whatever the man might be he took himself quite seriously and would be more impressed if he

knew that Tarzan was a man of position, and so he answered him truthfully, in his quiet way.

"A viscount," he said.

"A peer of the realm!" exclaimed Sir Bertram. "Prince Gobred will be o'er-pleased to greet thee, Lord Tarzan. Come thou with me, and I will furnish thee with apparel that befits thee."

The black struggled to be free, but the ape-man held him as he might have held a child. "Lie still," he advised; "I shall not harm you."

AT the outer barbican Bertram took Tarzan into the quarters reserved for the knight commanding the warders and kept him there while he sent his squire to the castle to fetch raiment and a horse; and while they waited, Bertram told Tarzan all that had befallen Blake since his arrival in Nímmr, and, also, much of the strange history of this unknown British colony.

When the squire returned with the clothing, it was found that it fitted the ape-man well—for Bertram was a large man—and presently Tarzan of the Apes was garbed as a knight of Nímmr and was riding down toward the castle with Sir Bertram. Here the knight announced him at the gate as the Lord Viscount Tarzan; and once within, introduced him to another knight whom he persuaded to relieve him at the gate while he conducted Tarzan to the lists, that he might be presented to Gobred and witness the final scenes of the tourney, were it not concluded before they arrived.

And so it was that Tarzan of the Apes, clad in chain mail, and armed with lance and sword, rode down into the Valley of the Sepulcher just as Bohun put his foul scheme into execution and carried off the Princess Guinalda.

Long before they reached the lists Sir Bertram was aware that something was amiss, for they could see the dust-clouds racing rapidly north away from the lists as though one body of knights pursued another. He put spurs to his mount, and Tarzan followed suit; and so they came at a stiff run to the lists, and there they found all pandemonium.

The women were mounting preparatory to riding back to Nímmr under escort of a few knights that Gobred had sent back to guard them. The men-at-arms were forming themselves into companies, but all was being done in a confused manner, since every now and then a great part of the company would rush to the highest parts of the

stands and peer off toward the north after the clouds of dust that revealed nothing to them.

Sir Bertram accosted one of his fellows. "What hath befallen?" he demanded.

"Bohun hath seized the Princess Guinalda and carried her away," came the astounding reply.

"Zounds!" cried Bertram, reining about. "Wilt ride with me in the service of our princess, Lord Tarzan?"

For answer Tarzan spurred his horse alongside of Bertram's and stirrup to stirrup the two set out across the plain, while far ahead of them Blake drew gradually closer and closer to the fleeing knights of the Sepulcher.

So thick was the cloud of dust they threw up, that they were hid from their pursuer even as he was hid from them, and so were unaware that Blake was near them.

The American carried no lance nor shield, but his sword clattered and clashed at his side, and at his right hip swung his forty-five. Whenever he had been armed, since he entered Nímmr, he had carried this weapon of another world and another age.

To curious queries he had answered that it was but a lucky talisman that he carried; but in his heart was the thought that some day it might stand him in better stead even than these simple knights and ladies could dream.

He knew that he would never use it except in battle, or as a last resort against overwhelming odds or unfair tactics; but he was glad that he carried it today, for it might mean the difference between liberty and captivity for the woman he loved.

SLOWLY he drew closer to the rearmost knights of the Sepulcher. Their mounts, bred and trained to the utmost endurance, and to carry the great weight of man and mail, kept to a brisk canter even after the first long spurt of speed that had carried them away from the lists of Nímmr.

The dust rolled up in clouds from iron-shod feet. Through it Blake groped, catching vague glimpses of mounted men just ahead. His black horse, powerful, fleet, courageous, showed no sign of fatigue. The rider carried his sword in his hand, ready. He was no longer a black knight, but a gray. Bassinet, hauberk, all the rich caparisons of his horse, the horse itself, were gray with dust.

Blake glimpsed a knight toward whom he was slowly drawing closer. This knight was gray! Like a flash Blake realized the value of the camouflage that chance had laid upon him. He might ride among them, and they would not suspect that he was not of them!

Instantly he sheathed his sword and pressed forward, but he edged off a little from the knight before he passed him. Urging the black ever a little faster than the others' chargers were going, Blake crept up through the ranks of Bohun's knights. Somewhere a knight was carrying double, and this knight he sought.

The nearer the head of the column he forged, the greater became the danger of discovery, for now the dust was less thick, and men could see further; but yet his own armor, his face, the leopard-skin of his bassinet, were coated thick with gray; and though knights peered intently at him as he passed, none recognized him.

Once one hailed him. "Is't thou, Percival?" he demanded.

"Nay," replied Blake, and spurred on a trifle faster.

NOW, dimly, just ahead, he saw several knights bunched close, and once he thought he glimpsed the fluttering garments of a woman in their midst. Pressing on, he drew close behind these; and there, surrounded by knights, he saw a woman held before one of the riders.

Drawing his sword, he spurred straight between two knights who rode close behind him who carried Guinalda; as Blake passed, he cut to the right and left, and the two knights rolled from their saddles.

At a touch of the spurs the black leaped abreast the young knight that was bearing off the Princess. So quickly was accomplished the thing that happened then, that the knights who rode scarce an arm's-length from him had not the time to realize what was occurring and prevent it.

Blake slipped his left arm about the girl, and at the same time thrust to the left above his left forearm, driving his blade far into the body of the youthful knight; then he spurred forward, carrying Guinalda from the dead arms as the knight pitched headlong from his saddle.

Blake's sword was wrenched from his grasp, so far had he driven it into the body of the man who had dared commit this wrong against the woman Blake loved.

Cries of rage arose about him as knights spurred in pursuit, and the black ran free

"Stop, I pray thee!" cried the fellow. "This is a friend of Sir James, but he will run me through with my own sword, an' ye press me too close!"

with no guiding hand upon the reins. A huge fellow loomed close just at Blake's rear, and another was closing in from the other side. The first man swung his sword as he stood in his stirrups, and the second was already reaching for Blake with his point.

Strange oaths were on their lips, and their countenances were contorted by rage as they strove to have the life of the rash man who had almost thwarted them in their design; but that he could succeed they had not the remotest belief, for he was one against a thousand.

Then something happened the like of which had never been known to them or their progenitors. A blue-barreled forty-five flashed from the holster at Blake's hip; there was a loud report, and the knight upon Blake's right rear lunged head foremost to the ground. Blake turned in his saddle and shot the knight upon his other side between the eyes.

TERRIFIED, the horses of other knights close by, who might have menaced him, bolted—as did the great black that Blake bestrode; but while the American was trying to replace his weapon in its holster and gather the reins in his right hand, he leaned to the left and thus forced the horse slowly around in the direction he wished him to go—his plan being to cut across the front of the knights of the Sepulcher and then turn southward toward Nimmr.

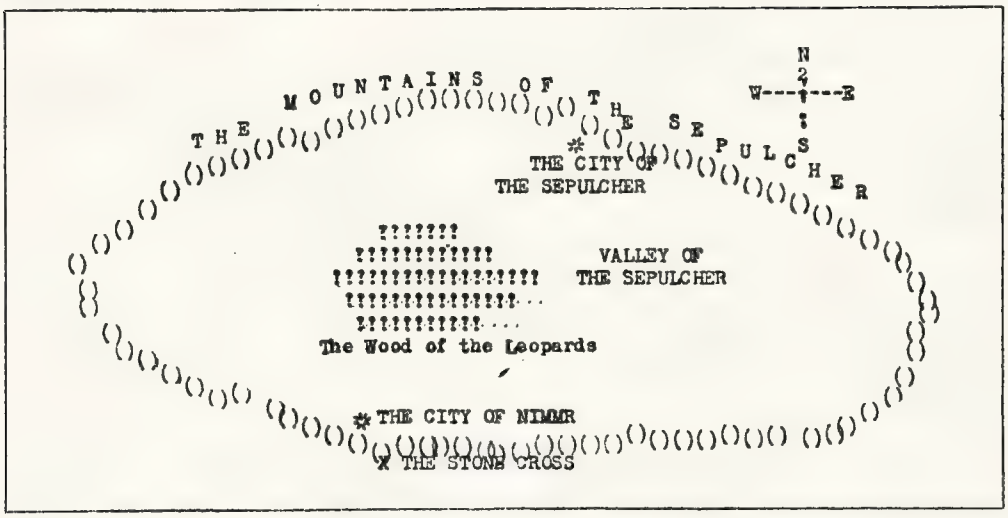
He was sure that Gobred and his followers must be close behind, and that it would be but a matter of minutes before he would have Guinalda safe behind a thousand or more knights, any one of whom would lay down his life for her.

But the knights of the Sepulcher had spread out over a very much greater front than Blake had anticipated; and now, presently, he saw them coming rapidly up upon his left, and was forced to swerve in a more northerly direction.

Closer and closer they came, and once more the American found it necessary to drop his reins and draw his forty-five. One shot sent the horses of the menacing knights rearing and plunging away from the terrifying sound, and it sent the black into a new paroxysm of panic that almost resulted in Blake and the girl being unhorsed.

But when the man finally brought the animal again under control, the dust cloud that marked the position of the knights of the Sepulcher was far behind, and close upon Blake's left was a great forest, whose dark depths offered concealment for the moment at least.

Reining quickly within, Sir James drew up and gently lowered Guinalda to the ground. Then he dismounted and tied the animal to a tree, for Blake was spent after what he had been through this day since



his first entry upon the lists, and the horse was spent as well.

He slipped the housing and the heavy saddle from the animal's back and took the great bit from his mouth, replacing a portion of the housing to serve as a cooler until the horse should be less heated; nor once did he glance at the Princess until he had finished caring for his beast.

THEN he turned and faced her. She was standing leaning against a tree, looking at him.

"Thou art brave, sir knight," she said softly, and then added arrogantly: "But still a boor."

Blake smiled, wanly. He was very tired and had no wish to argue.

"I'm sorry to ask you to do it," he said, ignoring what she had said to him, "but Sir Galahad, here, will have to be kept moving about a bit until he cools off, and I'm too fagged to do it."

The Princess Guinalda looked at him in wide-eyed amaze.

"Ye—ye mean," she stammered, "that I should lead the beast? I, a princess!"

"I can't do it, Guinalda," replied Blake. "I tell you I'm just about all in, lugging all these skid-chains about since sunrise. I guess you'll have to do it."

"Have to! Durst thou to command, knave?"

"Snap out of it, kid!" advised Blake curtly. "I'm responsible for your safety, and it may all depend on this horse. Get busy, and do as I tell you! Lead him back and forth slowly."

There were tears of rage in the eyes of the Princess Guinalda as she prepared to make an angry retort, but there was something in Blake's eyes that silenced her. She looked at him for a long moment, and then turned and walked to the black. Untying the rope that tethered him to the tree, she led him slowly to and fro, while Blake sat with his back against a great tree and watched out across the plain for the first sign of pursuit.

But there was no pursuit, for the knights of Nimmr had overtaken the knights of the Sepulcher, and the two forces were engaging in a running fight that was leading them further and further away toward the City of the Sepulcher upon the north side of the valley.

Guinalda led the black for half an hour. She led him in silence, and in silence Blake sat gazing out across the valley. Presently he turned toward the girl and rose to his feet.

"That'll be good," he said, approaching her. "Thank you. I'll rub him a bit now. I was too exhausted to do it before."

WITHOUT a word she turned the black over to him, and with dry leaves he rubbed the animal from muzzle to dock. When he had finished, he threw the housing over him again, and came and sat down beside the girl.

He let his eyes wander to her profile—to her straight nose, her short upper lip, her haughty chin. "She is beautiful," thought Blake, "but selfish, arrogant and cruel." But when she turned her eyes toward him,

even though they passed over him as though he had not been there, they seemed to belie all the other evidence against her.

He noticed that her eyes were never quiet. Her glances roved from place to place, but most often into the depths of the wood and upward among the branches of the trees. Once she started affrightedly and turned suddenly to gaze intently into the forest.

"What is it?" asked Blake.

"Methought something moved within the wood," she said. "Let us be gone."

"It is almost dusk," he replied. "When it is dark, we can ride to Nimmr in safety Some of Bohun's knights may still be searching for you."

"Yes?" he queried casually.

"Here lair the great leopards of Nimmr," she continued, "and after night falls, only a camp with many guards and beast-fires is safe from them, and even so not always then, for they have been known to leap upon a warder and, dragging him into the wood, devour him within hearing of the camp.

"But," suddenly her eyes responded to a new thought, "I had forgot the strange roaring weapon with which thou slew the knights of Bohun! Of a surety with that thou couldst slay all the leopards of the wood!"

Blake hesitated to undeceive her and add to her alarm. "Perhaps," he said, "it will

Something happened the like of which had never been known to them: A forty-five flashed from its holster; there was a report, and the knight lunged to the ground

"What!" she exclaimed. "Remain here until dark? Knowest thou not where we are?"

"Why, what's wrong with this place?" demanded the man.

She leaned toward him, her eyes wide with terror. "It is the Wood of the Leopards!" she whispered.

be as well to start now, for we have a long ride and it will soon be dark."

As he spoke, he started toward Sir Galahad. He had almost reached the horse when the animal suddenly raised its head and with up-pricked ears and dilated nostrils looked into the gathering shadows of the wood. For an instant the creature trembled like a leaf, and then, with a wild snort, he lay back with all his weight upon

the tether, and as it parted with a snap, he wheeled and raced out upon the plain.

Blake drew his gun and peered into the wood, but he saw nothing; nor could his atrophied sense of smell catch the scent that had come so clearly to the nostrils of Sir Galahad.

Eyes that he could not see were watching him, but they were not the eyes of Sheeta the leopard.

CHAPTER XX

"I Love You!"

LORD TARZAN rode with Sir Bertram in the wake of the knights of Nímmr; nor did they overtake them until after Blake had borne Guinalda out of the battle which had followed immediately the hosts of Gobred had overhauled the knights of the Sepulcher.

As the two approached, Tarzan saw opposing knights paired off in mortal combat. He saw a knight of Nímmr go down before an adversary's lance, and then the victor espied Tarzan.

"Have at you, sir knight!" cried he of the Sepulcher, and couched his lance and put spurs to his charger.

This was a new experience for the ape-man, a new adventure, a new thrill. He knew as much about jousting as he did about ping-pong, but from childhood he had wielded a spear, and so he smiled, undaunted, as the iron knight thundered down upon him.

Lord Tarzan waited, and the knight of the Sepulcher was disconcerted to see his adversary awaiting him, motionless, his spear not even couched to receive him.

Lord Bertram had reined in his horse to watch the combat and observe how the English peer accounted for himself in battle, and he too was perplexed. Was the man mad, or was he fearful of the issue?

As his antagonist approached him, Tarzan rose in his stirrups and carried his lance hand above and behind his head, and when the tip of the other's lance was yet five paces from him, the ape-man launched the heavy weapon as he had so often launched his hunting-spear and his war-spear in the chase and in battle.

IT was not Viscount Greystoke who faced the knight of the Sepulcher; it was not the king of the great apes; it was the chief of the Waziri, and no other arm in all the world could cast a war-spear as could his.

Forward his spear-hand shot; straight as an arrow sped the great lance. It struck the shield of the knight of the Sepulcher just above the boss, and splitting the heavy wood, drove into the heart of Tarzan's foe, and at the same instant the ape-man reined his horse aside as that of his fallen antagonist thundered past.

Sir Bertram shook his head and spurred to meet an antagonist that had just challenged him. He was not sure that the act of Lord Tarzan had been entirely ethical, but he had to admit that it had been magnificent.

The fortunes of the battle carried Tarzan toward the west. His lance gone, he fought with his sword. Luck and his great strength and wondrous agility carried him through two encounters. By this time the main scene of battle had drawn off toward the northeast.

Tarzan had accounted for his second man since he had lost his lance, and a knight of the Sepulcher had slain a knight of Nímmr. Now these two remained alone upon the field; nor did the other lose a moment in shouting his challenge at the ape-man.

Never in his life had Tarzan seen such fierce, bold men, such gluttons for battle. That they gloried in conflict and in death with a fierce lust that surpassed the maddest fanaticism he had ever witnessed, filled Tarzan's breast with admiration. What men! What warriors!

NOW the last knight was upon him and their swords clashed on ready buckler. They wheeled, turned, and struck again. They passed and spurred once more to close quarters. Each rose in his stirrups to deliver a terrific cut; each sought to cleave the other's skull.

The blade of the knight of the Sepulcher glanced from Tarzan's buckler and bit into the skull of the ape-man's charger, but Tarzan's edge smote true.

As his horse went down, Tarzan leaped free, his antagonist falling dead at his feet, while the riderless horse of the slain knight galloped swiftly off in the direction in which lay the City of the Sepulcher.

Tarzan looked about him. He was alone upon the field. Far to the north and east he saw the dust of the battle. The City of Nímmr lay across the plain toward the south. When the fight was over, it was

Each sought to cleave the other's skull; the blade of the knight of the Sepulcher glanced from Tarzan's buckler—but Tarzan's edge smote true.

there that Blake would ride, and it was Blake whom Tarzan wanted to find. The sun was sinking behind the western hills as Tarzan turned toward Nímmr.

The chain mail that he wore was heavy, hot and uncomfortable, and Tarzan had not gone far before he discarded it. He had his knife and his rope. These he always kept with him, but he left the sword with the armor, and with a sigh of relief continued on his way.

IBN JAD, as he had come across the valley from the City of the Sepulcher toward the city that he had seen upon the opposite side, had been perturbed by the great clouds of dust that had been raised by the knights of the Sepulcher and the pursuing Nímmrians.

Seeing a forest close upon his right hand, he had thought it wiser to seek its concealing shadows until he could learn more concerning that which had caused so great a dust-cloud, which he saw was rapidly approaching.

Within the forest it was cool, and here Ibn Jad and his followers rested.

"Let us remain here," suggested Abd-el-Aziz, "until evening, when we may approach the city under cover of darkness."

Ibn Jad approved the plan, and so they camped just within the forest and waited. They watched the dust-cloud pass and continue onward toward the City of the Sepulcher.

"*Billah,* it is well we did escape that village before yon host returned," said Ibn Jad.

They saw a horseman enter the forest, or pass to the south of it—they could not know which; but they were not interested in single horsemen, or in any horseman, and so they did not investigate. He seemed to be either carrying another person upon his horse with him, or some great bundle. At a distance they could not see which.

"Perhaps," said Abd-el-Aziz, "we shall find greater treasure in the city to the south."

"And perhaps the beautiful woman of whom the *sáhar* spoke," added Ibn Jad, "for she was not within the city we left this morning."

"There were some there that were beautiful," said Fahd.

"The one I seek is more beautiful than an houri," said Ibn Jad.

When they took up their march again shortly before dark, they moved very cau-

tiously just within the edge of the forest. They had covered a mile, perhaps, when those in the lead heard voices ahead. Ibn Jad sent one to investigate.

SOON the man was back, his eyes bright with excitement. "Ibn Jad," he whispered, "thou needst seek no farther: the houri is just ahead!"

Following the suggestion of the scout, Ibn Jad, followed by his companions, went deeper into the woods and approached Blake and Guinalda from the west. When Sir Galahad broke loose and Blake drew his forty-five, Ibn Jad knew that they could remain in concealment no longer. He called Fahd to him.

"Many of the Nasrânys speak the language thou didst learn among the soldiers of the North," he said; "speak thou therefore to this one in the same tongue, saying to him that we are friends and that we are lost."

When Fahd saw the Princess Guinalda, his eyes narrowed and he trembled almost as might a man with ague. Never in his life had Fahd seen so beautiful a woman; never had he dreamed that an houri might be so lovely.

"Do not fire upon us," he called to Blake from the concealment of some bushes. "We are friends. We are lost."

"Who are you?" demanded Blake, surprised to hear French spoken in the Valley of the Sepulcher.

"We are poor men from the desert country," replied Fahd. "We are lost. Help us to find our way, and the blessings of Allah shall be upon thee."

"Come out and let me see you," said Blake. "If you are friendly, you need not fear me. I've had all the trouble I'm looking for."

FAHD and Ibn Jad stepped out into view, and at sight of them Guinalda voiced a little scream and seized Blake's arm. "The Saracens!" she gasped.

"I guess they're Saracens, all right," said Blake; "but you needn't worry—they wont hurt you."

"Not harm a Crusader?" she demanded incredulously.

"These fellows never heard of a Crusader."

"Melikes not the way they look at me," whispered Guinalda.

"Well, neither do I, but perhaps they mean no harm."

WITH many smiles the 'Aarab gathered around the two, and through Fahd, Ibn Jad repeated his protestations of friendship and his delight at meeting one who could direct him from the valley. He asked many questions about the City of Nímmr, and all the while his followers pressed closer to Blake.

Of a sudden the smiles vanished from their faces, as at a signal from their sheik, four stalwart Beduins leaped upon the American and bore him to the ground, snatching his gun from him, while simultaneously two others seized the Princess Guinalda.

In a moment Blake was securely bound, and the 'Aarab were debating what disposition to make of him. Several wanted to slit his throat, but Ibn Jad counseled against it, since they were in a valley filled with the man's friends, and should the fortunes of war decide to throw some of the Beduw into the hands of the enemy, such captive Arabs would fare better if they spared this one's life.

Blake threatened, promised, begged that they give Guinalda her liberty, but Fahd only laughed at him. For a time it seemed almost certain that they were going to kill Blake, as one of the Beduins stood over him with a keen *khûsa* in his hand, awaiting the word from Ibn Jad.

IT was then that Guinalda tore free from those who held her and threw herself upon Blake to shield his body from the blade with her own.

"Thou shalt not slay him!" she cried. "Take my life an' thou must have Christian blood—but spare him!"

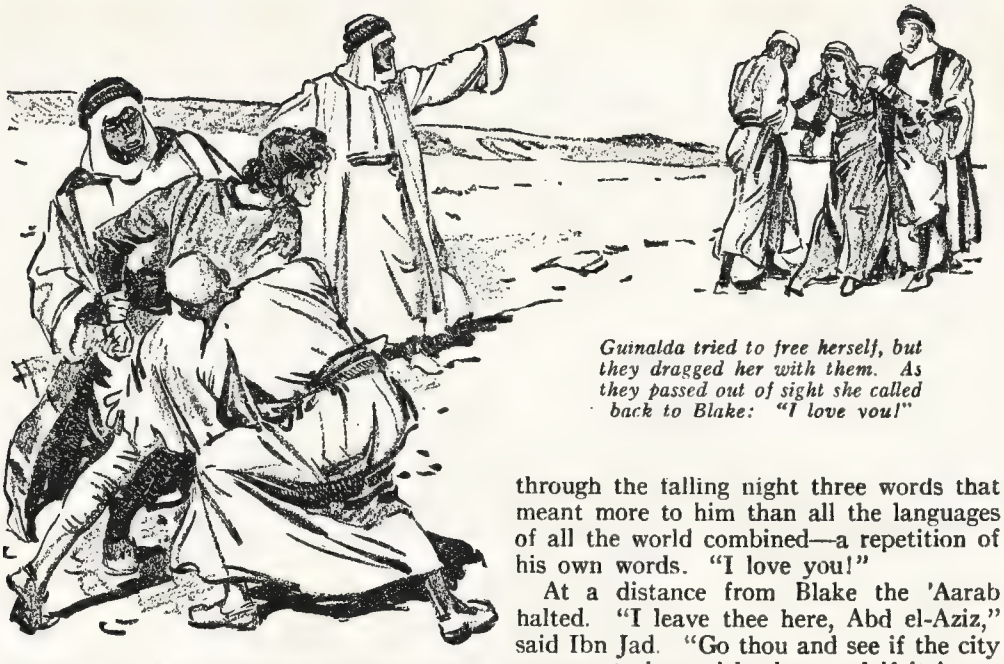
"They cannot understand you, Guinalda," said Blake. "Perhaps they will not kill me; but that does not matter. You must escape them."

"Oh, they must not kill thee—they shall not! Canst ever forgive me the cruel words I spoke? I did not mean them. My pride was hurt that thou shouldst say of me what Malud told me thou didst say, and so I spoke to hurt thee and not from my heart. Canst forgive me?"

"Forgive you? God love you, I could forgive you murder! But what did Malud tell you I had said?"

Guinalda shook her head.

"Oh, mind not now. I care not what thou didst say—I forgive it! Only say to me again the words that thou didst speak when I pinned my favor upon thy



Guinalda tried to free herself, but they dragged her with them. As they passed out of sight she called back to Blake: "I love you!"

hauberk, and I can forgive thee anything—anything!"

"What did Malud say?" insisted Blake sternly.

"That thou hadst bragged that thou wouldst win me and then cast my love aside," she whispered.

"The cur! You must know that he lied, Guinalda."

"Say what I have asked, and I shall know he lied," she murmured.

"I love you! I love you, Guinalda!" cried Blake.

THE Arabs laid heavy hands upon the girl and dragged her to her feet. Ibn Jad and the others still argued about the disposition to be made of Blake.

"By Ullah," exclaimed the sheik, at last. "we shall leave the Nasrâny where he lies and if he die, none can say that the Beduw did slay him.

"Abd el-Aziz," he continued, "take men and continue across the valley to that other city. Come, I shall accompany you away, and we will talk out of hearing of this Nasrâny, who perchance understandeth more of our tongue than he would have us guess."

As they moved toward the south, Guinalda tried to free herself again from the grasp of her captors, but they dragged her with them. Yet until the last Blake saw her struggling and saw her dear face turned toward him, and as they passed out of sight among the trees, she called back through the falling night three words that meant more to him than all the languages of all the world combined—a repetition of his own words. "I love you!"

At a distance from Blake the 'Aarab halted. "I leave thee here, Abd el-Aziz," said Ibn Jad. "Go thou and see if the city appears to be a rich place and if it is too strongly guarded, make no attempt to loot it, but return to the *menzil* that will be just beyond the northern summit where it now is, or if we move it, we shall make our trail plain that you may follow us.

"I shall hasten from the valley with this rich treasure that we now have, not the least of which is the woman. *Billah!* In the north she will fetch the ransom of a dozen sheiks.

"Go, Abd-el-Aziz, and may Allah be with thee!"

Ibn Jad turned directly north. His belief that the great body of horsemen he had glimpsed amid the distant dust were returning to the city he had sacked argued against his attempting to leave the valley by the same route that he had entered it, and so he had determined to attempt to scale the steep mountains at a point west of the City of the Sepulcher, avoiding the castle and its defenders entirely.

BLAKE heard the retreating footsteps of the Beduins die away in the distance. He struggled with his bonds, but the camel leather held securely. Then he lay quiet. How silent, how lonely the great, black wood—the Wood of the Leopards! Blake listened. Momentarily he expected to hear the fall of padded feet, the sound of a great furred body approaching through the underbrush. The slow minutes dragged. An hour had passed.

The moon rose—a great, swollen red

moon that floated silently up from behind distant mountains. This moon was looking down upon Guinalda as it was on him. He whispered a message to it—a message for his Princess. It was the first time that Blake ever had been in love, and he almost forgot his bonds and the leopards, in recalling those three words that Guinalda had tossed back at the instant of their separation. . . . .

What was that? Blake strained his eyes into the darkness of the shadowy wood. Something was moving! Yes, it was the sound of stealthy, padded feet—the scraping of a furred body against leaves and twigs. A leopard of the wood was coming!

Hark! There must be another in a nearby tree, for he was sure that he could see a shadowy form almost above him.

The moonlight, shining from the low moon near the eastern horizon, crept beneath the trees and lighted the ground upon which Blake lay, and beyond him for a dozen yards and more.

Presently into this moonlit space stepped a great leopard.

BLAKE saw the blazing eyes, felt them burning into him like fire. He could not tear his own from the great snarling figure, where it was held in awful fascination.

The carnivore crouched and crept closer. Inch by inch it crept upon him as though with the studied cruelty of premeditated torture. He saw the sinuous tail lashing from side to side. He saw the great fangs bared. He saw the beast flatten itself against the ground, its muscles tensed. It was about to spring! Helpless, horrified, Blake could not take his eyes from the hideous, snarling face.

He saw it leap suddenly with the lightness and agility of a house-cat—and at the same instant he saw something flash through the air. The leopard stopped in mid-leap and was jerked backward; and then Blake's astonished eyes saw it being hauled upward into a tree that overhung the spot.

He saw the shadowy form that he had seen before, but now he saw that it was a man, and that it was hauling the leopard upward by a rope that had been cast about the beast's neck at the instant that it had risen to leap upon him.

Screaming, pawing with raking talons, Sheeta the leopard was dragged upward. A mighty hand reached out and grasped the great cat by the scruff of the neck, and another hand drove a knife-blade into the savage heart.

WHEN Sheeta ceased to struggle, and hung quiet, the hand released its grasp, and the dead body of the great beast thudded to the ground beside Blake. Then the godlike figure of an almost naked white man dropped lightly to the leafy mold.

Blake voiced an exclamation of surprised delight. "Tarzan of the Apes!" he cried.

"Blake?" demanded the ape-man, and then: "At last! And I didn't find you much too soon, either."

"I'll tell the world you didn't!" exclaimed Blake.

Tarzan cut the bonds that held the American.

"You've been looking for me?" asked Blake.

"Ever since I learned that you had become separated from your safari."

"By George, that was white of you!"

"Who left you trussed up here?"

"A bunch of Arabs."

Something like a growl escaped the lips of the ape-man. "That villainous old Ibn Jad here?" he demanded incredulously.

"They took a girl who was with me," said Blake. "I do not need to ask you to help me to rescue her, I know."

"Which way did they go?" asked Tarzan.

"There." And Blake pointed toward the south.

"When?"

"About an hour ago."

"You'd better shed the rest of that armor," advised Tarzan. "It makes walking a punishment—I just tried it."

With the ape-man's help, Blake got out of his coat of mail, and then the two set out upon the plain trail of the Arab. At the point where Ibn Jad had turned back toward the north, they were at a loss to know which of the two spoors to follow, for here the footprints of Guinalda, which the ape-man had been able to pick up from time to time since they left the spot where the girl had been seized, disappeared entirely.

THEY wondered what had become of them and they could not know that here, when she found that Ibn Jad was going to turn back with her away from

Nímmr, she had refused to walk farther. It had been all right as long as they were approaching Nímmr, but she refused absolutely to be a party to her own abduction when it led away from home.

What breeze there was was blowing from the east, nullifying the value of Tarzan's sense of smell, and even the great ape-man could not know in what direction or with which party Guinalda had been carried away.

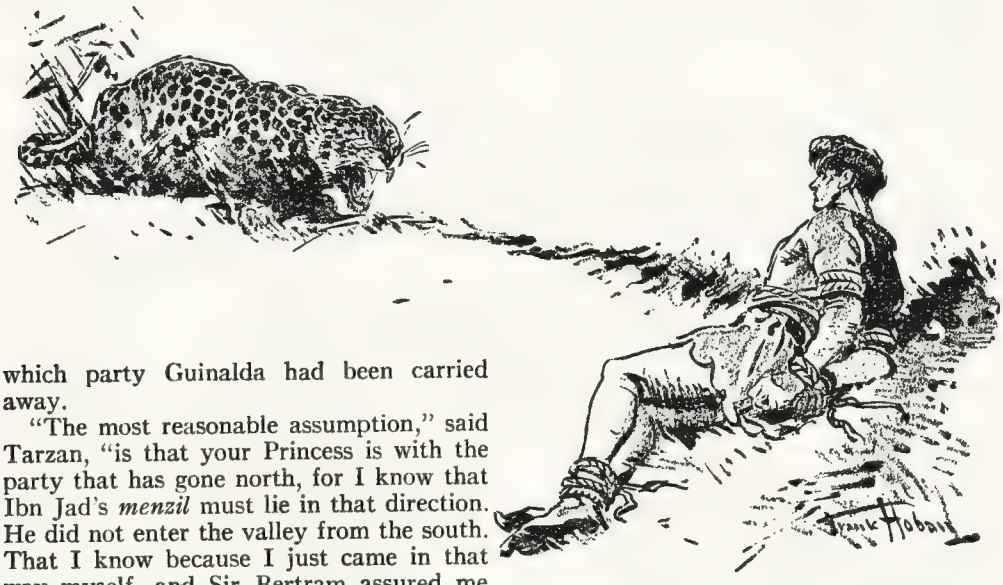
"The most reasonable assumption," said Tarzan, "is that your Princess is with the party that has gone north, for I know that Ibn Jad's *menzil* must lie in that direction. He did not enter the valley from the south. That I know because I just came in that way myself, and Sir Bertram assured me that there are only two entrances—the one through which I came, and a pass above the City of the Sepulcher.

"Ibn Jad would want to get the girl out of the valley and into his camp as soon as possible, whether he is going to hold her for ransom or take her north to sell her. The party that went south toward Nímmr may have been sent to treat with her people for a ransom; but the chances are that she is not with that party.

"However, it is at best but a matter of conjecture. We must ascertain definitely, and I suggest that you follow the northern spoor, which is, I am certain, the one that will lead to the girl, while I overtake the party to the south.

"I can travel faster than you, and if I am right and the girl is with the northern party, I'll turn back and overtake you without much loss of time. If you catch up with the other band and find that the girl is not with them, you can turn back and join me; but if she is with them, you'd better not risk trying to recover her until you have help, for you are unarmed and those Beduins would think no more of cutting your throat than they would of drinking a cup of coffee.

"Now, good-by and good luck!" And Tarzan of the Apes was off at a trot upon the trail of the party that had gone in the direction of Nímmr, while Blake turned northward to face a dismal journey through the black depths of the Wood of the Leopards.



Blake could not tear his eyes from the great snarling figure, as inch by inch it crept upon him.

CHAPTER XXI

"For Every Jewel a Drop of Blood!"

ALL night Ibn Jad and his party marched northward, and though they were hampered by the refusal of Guinalda to walk, yet they made rapid progress, for they were spurred on by their great desire to escape from the valley with their booty before they should be discovered and set upon by the great host of fighting men they were now convinced were quartered in the castle and city they had been fortunate enough to find almost deserted.

Avarice gave them strength and endurance far beyond that which they normally displayed, with the result that dawn found them at the foot of the rugged mountains that Ibn Jad had determined to scale rather than attempt an assault upon the castle which guarded the easy way from the valley.

It was a jaded party that won eventually

to the pass just above the outer barbican that guards the road to the City of the Sepulcher; nor were they discovered by the warders there until the last man of them was safely on the trail leading to the low saddle at the summit of the mountains, beyond which lay the *menzil* of the Bedouins.

The defenders of the barbican made a sortie against them and approached their rear so closely that the sir knight who commanded saw Guinalda and recognized her; but a volley from the matchlocks of the desert people sent the crudely armed soldiers of Bohun back in retreat, though the brave knight couched his lance and charged again until his horse was brought down by a bullet and he lay pinned beneath the carcass of the animal.

It was afternoon before Ibn Jad with his fagged company staggered into the *menzil,* and though they dropped in their tracks from sheer exhaustion, he allowed them but an hour of sleep before he gave the signal for the *ráhla,* for the sheik of the fendy el-Guad was filled with an ever-increasing fear that the treasure and the woman would be taken away from him before he could reach the sandy wastes of his own barren *béled.*

THE heavy weight of the treasure had been divided into several bundles, and these were distributed among his least mistrusted followers, while the custody of the girl captive was placed in the hands of Fahd, whose evil eyes filled the Princess with fear and loathing.

Stimbol, who had secretly scoffed at the stories of treasure and the mad tales of a beautiful woman that the 'Aarab expected to find in some fabulous, hidden city, was dumfounded when he viewed the spoils of the Beduin raid, and at first was inclined to attribute them to the hallucinations of his fever-racked brain.

Weak and feeble, he staggered along the trail, keeping as close to Fahd as he could, for he knew that of all the company this unscrupulous scoundrel would be most likely to assist him, since to Fahd a live Stimbol meant great wealth; nor was Fahd unmindful of the fact. And now there was another purpose in the evil mind of the Bedouin who had conceived for the white girl an infatuation that was driving him to the verge of madness.

With the wealth that Stimbol had promised him, Fahd realized that he could afford to possess this lovely houri, whom otherwise a poor Beduwy must sell for the great price that she would bring; and so there revolved in the mind of Fahd many schemes whereby he might hope to gain sole possession of both Guinalda and Stimbol; but always there loomed in the path of every plan that he considered the dour figure of his greedy sheik.

At the foot of the Mountains of the Sepulcher, Ibn Jad turned toward the east, planning thus to avoid passing again through the country of Batando. Beyond the eastern end of the range he would turn south again, and later strike west just above the northern limits of the territory that was nominally Tarzan's, for though sure that the Lord of the Jungle was dead, he yet feared the vengeance of his people.

It was late before Ibn Jad made camp. The preparations for the evening meal were hurried. The light from the cooking fire, and the paper lanterns in the *beyt* of the sheik, were dim and flickering, yet not so dim but that Ateja saw Fahd drop something into the bowl of food that she had prepared for Ibn Jad, and which stood upon the ground between him and his would-be assassin.

As the sheik reached for the receptacle, Ateja stepped from the women's quarters and struck it from his hand, but before she could explain her act or charge Fahd with his villainy, the culprit, realizing that his perfidy had been discovered, leaped to his feet and seizing his matchlock, sprang into the women's quarters, where Guinalda had been left under the watchful care of Hirfa and Ateja.

SEIZING the girl by the wrist and dragging her after him, Fahd broke through the curtains at the rear of the *beyt* and ran in the direction of his own tent. By this time the *mukaad* of Ibn Jad was in an uproar. The sheik was demanding an explanation from Ateja, and still unaware that Fahd had escaped through the rear of the *beyt,* no one had followed him into the women's quarters.

"He placed *simm* in thy food!" cried Ateja. "I saw him and the proof of it is that he fled when he knew that I had seen."

"Billah!" exclaimed Ibn Jad. "The son of a jackal would poison me? Seize him and fetch him to me!"

"He hath fled through the *beyt!"* cried Hirfa; "and hath taken the Nasrawîa with him!"

The Beduins sprang to their feet and took after Fahd, but at his own *beyt* he stopped them with a bullet and they retreated. In his own tent he seized Stimbol, who was lying upon a filthy sleeping-mat, and dragged him to his feet.

"Hasten!" he hissed in the American's ear. "Ibn Jad has ordered that thou be slain! Quick! Follow me and I will save thee."

Again Fahd had recourse to the rear curtains of a *beyt,* and as his fellows approached the front in anger but still with caution, Fahd, dragging Guinalda and followed by Stimbol, sneaked through the darkness of the *menzil* and turned toward the west.

DUSK had fallen when Blake, following the plain trail of Ibn Jad, finally clambered over the last escarpment and stood upon the trail that led through the pass toward the outer world beyond the Valley of the Sepulcher.

A hundred yards to his right loomed the gray towers of the barbican; to his left was the trail that led in the direction of his heart's desire; and all about him, concealed in the bushes, were the men-at-arms of King Bohun of the Sepulcher; but this he did not guess, for how could he know that for hours the eyes of the warders had been watching his slow ascent toward the pass trail?

Spent by the long climb following hours of grueling exertion without food or rest, unarmed, Blake was helpless to resist or to attempt escape when a dozen armed men stepped from the surrounding bushes and encircled him in a band of steel; and so Sir James of Nímmr was seized and haled before King Bohun, and when he was questioned and Bohun found that he was the same black knight that had thwarted his plan to abduct the Princess Guinalda, he could scarce contain himself.

Assuring Blake only of the fact that he would be put to death as soon as Bohun could determine upon a fate commensurate with the heinousness of the crime, the King ordered him to be placed in chains, and the American was led away by guards to a black hole beneath the castle, where by the light of flares a smith forged a heavy iron band about one ankle, and he was chained to a damp stone wall.

In the light of the flare Blake saw two emaciated, naked creatures similarly chained, and in a far corner glimpsed a skeleton among the bones of which rusted a length of chain and a great anklet. Then they left him, taking the flares with them, and Blake was left in darkness and despair.

UPON the plain, below the City of Nímmr, Tarzan had overtaken the party of Beduins led by Abd el-Aziz, and after assuring himself that the girl was not with them, he had turned without revealing himself to them and hurried northward to take up the trail of the other party.

Requiring food and rest, he lay up in the Wood of the Leopards during the heat of the day after stalking Horta the boar and making a quick kill. His belly filled, the ape-man found a high-flung tree-crotch where there was little likelihood of the heavy leopards of Nímmr disturbing his slumbers, and here he slept until the sun was sinking behind the western mountains.

Early the following morning he reached the deserted *menzil* where Ibn Jad's people had camped during his incursion of the Valley of the Sepulcher.

Sometime since, he had lost the spoor of Blake, but that of the girl frequently recurred, and as her rescue now took precedence over other considerations, he followed doggedly along the trail of Ibn Jad. For a time he was mystified by the fact that Guinalda's spoor, well marked by the imprints of the tiny sandals of medieval design, did not appear among the footprints of those who left the Beduin *menzil,* and he lost some time searching about in an effort to discover a clew to the riddle; presently, however, he hit upon the truth, which lay in the fact that Guinalda's light sandals having been badly worn by her journey and far too tight for comfortable walking, she had been given a pair belonging to Ateja, and thus it became difficult to differentiate between the spoor of the two girls, who were of equal weight and of a similarity of carriage that rendered their footprints practically identical.

Tarzan therefore contented himself with following the spoor of the party, and so it was that he passed their first night's camp, where Fahd had stolen Guinalda from the sheik, without discovering that three of its members had there turned to the west, while the main body of the 'Aarab marched toward the east.

Even more exciting are the ensuing chapters of this most remarkable of novels—in the next, the May, issue.

A vivid little story-in-brief, by the man who wrote "The One-Man Dog."

Hidden Rings

By CHARLES V. BRERETON

"SIT still, folks! Keep quiet and there'll be no one hurt."

The voice was sharp, incisive, its tones carrying conviction even without the knowledge that the speaker stood in the doorway, two amazingly long pistols seemingly searching out each of the scores of suddenly sobered individuals who sat at snowy tables.

"A raid!" Thus a hoarse whisper.

"No, you fool," another warned fiercely, "can't you see his mask? It's a hold-up."

A stout youth who sat with his stouter blonde lady at a table near the service-door reached stealthily for a slim-necked, heavy-bodied carafe—then pitched forward in a crash of flying glassware to lie face downward across his table. A second bandit, herding waiters and chefs before him, had entered the service-door just as the stout youth had reached for the water carafe. The bandit had acted quickly and the gun he carried was heavy.

"My Gawd!" gasped the blonde. The elaborate white and gold enameled chair creaked as she slumped in it, her mouth slacked open.

"All right back there, Bud?" the cool voice of the man at the front door was asking.

"Yep," his companion answered. "Everyone in the house is here. The back door is locked."

"Get busy, then, before some more of these gay revelers try to start something and have to be stopped." To the terrified faces turned his way he said:

"I'll tell you once more, folks, that we're here to clean up, and if you're nice about it we'll be nice also. But the first one of you who makes a sudden move is going to be hurt—bad." A painful silence was his only answer. Some of the men, whose hands had been held aloft, lowered them gently, as though handling fragile objects, to the tables in front of them.

The bandit called Bud lowered his menacing weapon and with his left hand swept off his hat, exposing a wealth of dark curls above the red bandanna that hid his face. And with hat in hand, he went swiftly from table to table.

None demurred at adding to the heap of notes and silver and jewelry. Some were

philosophic, tossing in their contributions with scarcely a glance at the grimly masked collector, but others were trembling, white-faced, as though this taking of their worldly goods was a catastrophe from which they could never recover. The stout blonde wept visibly and audibly as she handed two glittering rings and a platinum-strung necklace to the waiting Bud. At a table near the back of the room, a girl whose fresh cheeks proclaimed her unspoiled youth, had been busy with slim arms below her table, but as Bud stopped beside her the man at the door called out:

"That jane has been hiding something under her clothes. Stand her up on the table and see what it is, unless she wants to hand it to you."

For a moment the girl colored fearfully, eying those inscrutable orbs above the red mask, then from the protection of the table she produced a heavy wallet. The boy who sat with her gazed straight ahead, his finely chiseled face deathly white, but the girl still hesitated as she held out a marvelous stone that glowed like a burning rainbow.

"My father gave me that," she pleaded.

Bud, for the first time, chuckled harshly.

"Serves you right, young woman," he jeered. "Go tell your father where you were and what you were doing when you lost it."

As she flung the bauble into the hat the girl dropped her head on her arms and sobbed uncontrollably. . . .

When the last table had been visited, the register behind the ornate bar had been emptied and even the stoical, hard-faced waiters stripped of lavish tips and flamboyant sparklers, Bud swung about, the masked figures backed quickly out into the night and the door slammed. Bedlam broke loose in the cafe. But the waiter captain threw up his arms, shouting for attention.

"We can't make too much noise about this," he said. "The house has lost no more tonight than it has at times before from blasted hijackers like those two, and we don't aim to call the police this time either. Most of you folks wont care much about making a squeal if you stop to think a little. We're all in it together."

The uproar subsided into a silence that was agonizing as realization gained possession. Diner looked at diner, momentarily dropping the mask of polite indifference as understanding gained sway. The time, the place, the situation! They would be as one in the public eye with those hard-faced men who leaned against the bar, eying each other with expressionless, understanding gaze. The stout blonde gazed wetly at the third finger of her left hand where a platinum hoop with many diamonds had been, and shivered at thought of the speculative look she had noticed in the senator's eyes of late. But the stout youth had been such a good pal! She feverishly gulped the tall amber drink that had, somehow, survived the wreck of the dinner. Some one yelled for music and the captain motioned to the trembling, yellow-faced orchestra.

"Never mind about money," he called. "The house will stand treat. Let's forget it."

But the slim girl rose drearily from her chair.

"Take me home, Bob," she said. "Dad gave me that ring when I told him I was sure to graduate. Now I've got to go home without it. And I'd never dare tell him I'd visited a place like this. He'd never understand. He's always been so strict."

Bob nodded moodily.

"I know, Babs. Worse couldn't have happened. In that wallet of mine was a thousand of the company's money that I didn't turn in tonight. I can't pay it back before they find out."

A GLOOMY, silent pair, they went out, as the orchestra again blared its raucous notes. But as boy and girl made their way toward Bob's roadster a voice came out of the dark. In panic the girl grasped her escort's arm. It was the voice of the man who had stood in the doorway.

"Here are the things we took from you, Miss Barbara," the bandit said. "For God's sake don't tell the Chief you were here tonight. I didn't know it until Bud made you dig up the things you had hidden and I saw your face."

His form dimly discernible in the shade of the rustling elms, the bandit thrust Bob's wallet at the girl and dropped the ring into her upturned palm.

"The—the Chief?" Barbara stammered. "Who—"

"Your father!" the hijacker snarled as he melted into the covering darkness. "Bud and I would get rubbed out before morning if he knew of this."

Five to One

By ROLLIN BROWN

BACK in Jamesburg, old man Potts had failed to give Jimmy the raise he wanted. Failed doesn't quite express it; Potts had positively refused—owing to the circumstances. That same night Miss Sue Bailey had been equally positive and firm. She wasn't going to marry Jimmy; that was final. She said it slowly, with the bit of a lisp she cultivated.

But Jamesburg, N. J., wasn't Panama City, Republic of Panama, C. A. . . . .

Plop! The sound had a nice, artful smack to it. One hears such *plops* from the boxing ring. But this one happened to be made by the firm, white palm of a girl's hand colliding with Jimmy Ackers' left cheek—Jimmy Ackers, formerly of J. C. Potts & Co., Jamesburg, who in his disappointment had taken to the sea, to forget or something.

"Now 'tend to your own knitting," said the girl, in good United States English.

Wong Fu, the Chinese proprietor, grinned. From the street below there came the shrill, throbbing beat of a Cuban *danzón,* played on an American phonograph. The rattle of a *coche's* wheels went by on a cobbled pavement, and a Jamaican negro driver shouted to another in Panamanian Spanish. The girl adjusted the sign, just beside the cash register on the counter before her, a sign printed in three languages, and reading in all: *"Pay here as you leave."*

"All right! That's that!" she told Jimmy, while her left hand went down under the counter beside her and patted the head of a thin dog.

"Your suey's getting cold on the table," she added. "Trot back and inhale it."

The officer's messboy, a wizen man of forty, and a wiper of the freighter *Chet Boller,* bound out of Panama in the morning for the Orient, laughed uproariously. The messboy wiped tears from his eyes as Jimmy sat down. He took another drink from the bottle the wiper had ordered.

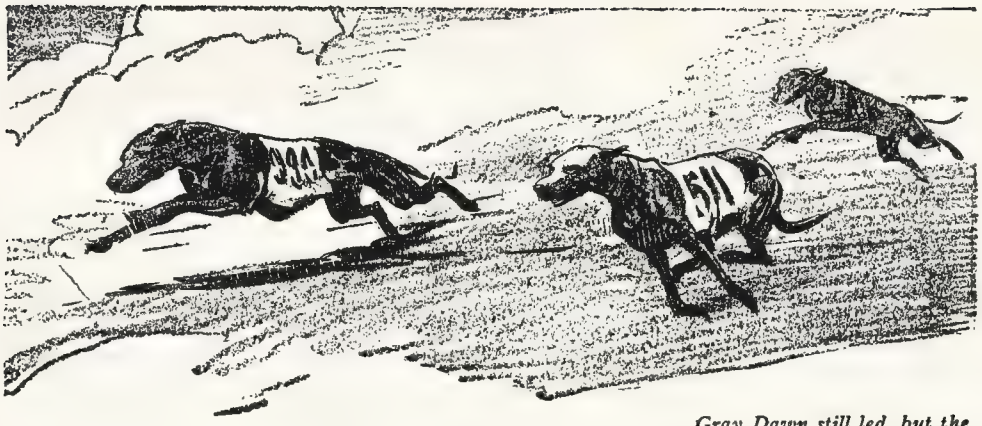
"Don't be down—downcashed, son," he managed toward Jimmy, finally. "Don't be. The good ol' *Chet Boller* hits other ports. The Island, Kobe, Shanghai— Hev a drink."

"No," said Jimmy. "Shut up! There aint no other ports to come. I'm hoppin' ship here."

"Huh?" the wiper grunted.

"I said it," said Jimmy. "I just made up my mind. I'm jumpin' ship here."

The distance in miles is far between Jamesburg, N. J., and Panama City, C. A., but they are farther apart in other ways. This was the Jimmy Ackers who had once aspired to become department man-



Gray Dawn still led, but the dun-yellow had crept up on his flanks. "Perro! Perro!"

The story of a great dog-race and of two young people who gambled heavily—by the author of "Forgotten Country."

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

ager for J. C. Potts & Co., and had wished for the hand of the lisping Miss Sue Bailey —and had hesitated long in the asking of either. . . . . He meant it, too. When the wiper attempted to drag him out, he followed meekly as far as the stairs from Wong Fu's café into the street. There he gave the wiper a sturdy shove downward. He returned to the table and drank black coffee—and watched the girl. He had fifty-seven dollars in good American bills sewn into the lining of his coat and a handful of change in his trousers.

At two A. M., when Wong Fu closed up, he approached the girl hesitantly.

"I'm awful sorry," he said. "Awful!"

The girl looked up. "So that's what you've been waiting for?" she said. "For three hours! Well, I've had them get fresh before, but they never waited like that to apologize. Well! It's accepted, Mister." She turned up a friendly smile, a brief affair of even, white teeth between naturally red lips. "Good night."

"Good—" said Jimmy. "No, that wasn't all. I— I'd hoped maybe—maybe you'd let me see you to your door tonight. It's pretty late, an'—"

"See me to my door?" said the girl. "Well! Say, I haven't heard that for—oh, let's see—" But she didn't say how long it had been. Instead she said: "Nobody sees me home—savvy?"

THE girl's name was Mary Smith; but she had changed it once, for a brief three months, into Marie La Valle. That much seemed necessary to a stage career. She was nineteen years old, and came from a town out in Ohio, U. S. A., called Willowbrook. Many girls leave Willowbrooks, and the like, for New York and a stage career. Mary had finally made a chorus; but the show had flopped. Then she had had the chance to come to Panama.

For four nights Jimmy dined at Wong Fu's. He came at seven o'clock, and he stayed till two A. M. On the fifth night, the girl said: "Such perseverance! What's your name?"

"Jimmy—Jimmy Ackers."

"And since that first night I've never seen you touch more than black coffee," she remarked.

"May I see you home tonight?" asked Jimmy.

She appeared to consider this tall, fair-haired young man very critically.

"Well, Mr. Ackers," she said, finally, "just this once. Such perseverance! Run down, now, if you've got the price, and hail a *coche*."

On the sidewalk below, Jimmy tore a fresh bill from the lining of his coat. The girl smiled at him amusedly as she settled back into the cushions of the cab, and said, "How nice!"

"Ask the pooch in," Jimmy suggested.

"Perro!" she called softly.

The tall, sinewy dog that sat each night under the counter at her feet leaped lightly into the carriage and settled his long nose into her lap. She gave the *cochero* her address in swift Spanish.

"How nice," she said again, either to Jimmy or the dog.

The *coche* rattled along—wobbling, iron-shod wheels over cobbled pavement, and the *clack-clack-click* of horses' hoofs. Interspaced street lamps threw shifting, long bluish lights into the carriage. From her side of the seat, just to make conversation, she began to tell Jimmy about the New York show and how it had flopped.

"But I really should have had more sense than to come down here," she said. "I really should. Six girls of us from broken shows, to form a snappy cabaret chorus! I should have known."

"When you found out," Jimmy said, "you got the job in the Chink joint?"

"Yes. A Chink joint's a Chink joint, goodness knows! And Wong Fu pays little enough for a cashier, but that's all he wants —one that can speak English and Spanish fluently, because he can't. I learned my Spanish in the Willowbrook High School. And somehow, Mr. Ackers, although I can't say just why, you remind me of Willowbrook, Ohio."

"That's funny," said Jimmy, "because somehow you make me think of Jamesburg, New Jersey,—not that I want to go back. Do you like it down here?"

"Like it? Now, Mr. Ackers, aren't you the wise-cracker? I've saved just twenty-five good American dollars out of my wage in four months. And I'm counting the minutes until I can book home. But you're a mathematician, maybe; you figure just how long that'll be."

"Gosh!" said Jimmy. "Gosh!" He considered this for a time. "But isn't there a consul, or something, that you could see? Some of the Americans in the Zone with money?"

"Sure. I had it fixed once. The cranky wife of a colonel over there was to loan me passage-money. That was the day I found Perro, here—a mangy, starved, half-grown pup that somebody had tin-canned. Poor little devil! I don't think he'd ever had a full stomach in his life. . . . . To be brief, Mr. Ackers, when the colonel's wife found I insisted on taking the dog,—ten dollars extra for his passage,—she threw up her hands. She said that before she had thought that I was in earnest, that it was a case of charity well placed. I went back to the Chink joint, Mr. Ackers."

Jimmy rubbed Perro's wet nose.

"*Perro* means *dog* in Spanish," she told him. "Just dog. Personally, though, I think he's a greyhound, or something like that. You just can't make him fat!"

THAT night—it was three o'clock—Jimmy Ackers wrote a short letter from his hotel to Mr. Potts, of J. C. Potts & Co., Jamesburg, because somehow he didn't feel like sleep:

> **Dear Mr. Potts:**
>
> Since leaving your employ things have gone splendidly with me. It was with thought of a vacation and rest that I journeyed down to Panama City, C. A. But here I find business conditions very brisk. The City—and the tropics in general, I might add—delight me. I plan to make this my home for some time.
>
> I know that you will be glad to learn that I have had numerous business offers, and that I shall shortly accept one—after the customary careful inspection of its possibilities—at a very much advanced salary over what I was receiving in Jamesburg.
>
> Wishing you, also, much success, I am,
>
> Sincerely yours,
>
> James Ackers.

Jimmy had been intending to write Mr. Potts all along. Mr. Potts was an uncle, by marriage, to Miss Sue Bailey. In its first conception Jimmy had had in mind that Mr. Potts would mention the letter, perhaps show it, to Sue. Now, he didn't care whether this happened or not. But he wanted to show Potts, nevertheless, that his little one-horse factory wasn't the only pond in the world. The part about "business offers" slid off nicely now, too. Because tomorrow—or today, rather—Jimmy was going to investigate offers.

He did. But by the next evening he had decided that there weren't many offers; and the third day he asked openly for a job.

"Jimmy, when's your boat due to pull out?" Mary Smith asked. "You've been here eight or ten days now."

"Yes. An' the *Chet Boller's* been gone eight or ten days now. I jumped ship—that first night."

"Jimmy, you poor nut!"

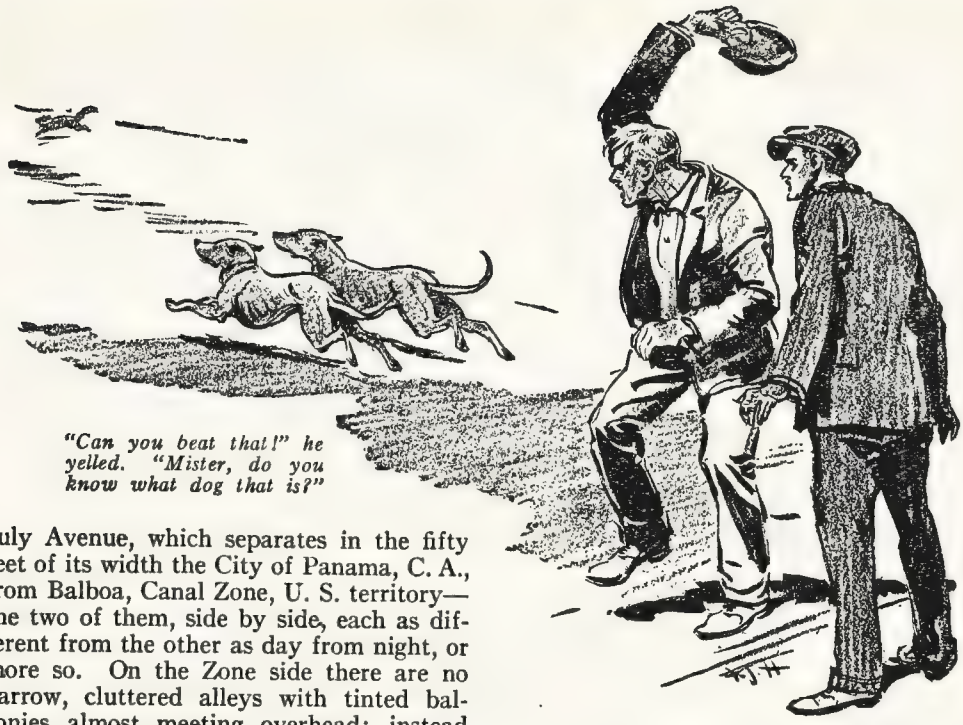
"I couldn't help it," said Jimmy.

She became practical. "How much money have you left?"

"Oh, fifteen or twenty dollars."

"Then there's not a minute to lose," she informed him. "Tomorrow you go over into the Zone and try to get a berth on any home-bound boat you can find. Buy one—any kind of a job. Hear me, Jimmy? And don't let moss grow under your toes. I've been here long enough to know!"

So Jimmy crossed over that most extraordinary street which is called Fourth of



"Can you beat that!" he yelled. "Mister, do you know what dog that is?"

July Avenue, which separates in the fifty feet of its width the City of Panama, C. A., from Balboa, Canal Zone, U. S. territory—the two of them, side by side, each as different from the other as day from night, or more so. On the Zone side there are no narrow, cluttered alleys with tinted balconies almost meeting overhead; instead there are broad, winding pavements, and nicely clipped lawns, and American bungalows, fitted for the tropics. There are trimmed hedges; and the mangoes are planted in rows along the curbs, to make shade trees.

Jimmy, by special concession, took Perro with him that day, because the dog surely needed exercise. But Jimmy didn't go near the great docks and their transient ships. He looked for a job on land—almost any kind of a job now.

Somehow, at late afternoon, he fell into step with a man who was going the same way he was; that is, back toward Panama City. The man was about Jimmy's size, only fatter. He had a worn, brown cap pulled over one ear, and he rolled and smoked brown-paper cigarettes continually. He had a nervous way with his hands, and eyes that couldn't hold still. Like Jimmy, he had a dog trotting at his heels, only this dog was even taller than Perro, and even thinner. The animal was beautifully groomed and wore a thin silver collar.

"A job?" this man said. "A job, mowin' lawns or sumpthin', you say? Say, are you crazy, feller? . . . . These here is Army officers' homes. Did you ever hear of an Army officer wastin' his jack hirin' men—with all the sturdy buck privates there is in the Army? Say, aint you the green oyster! How long you been here?"

" 'Bout two weeks," said Jimmy resentfully.

"Oh!" said the man, as though that explained everything.

He had just started to tell Jimmy more when a large Persian cat decided to cross the pavement, up ahead, from one bungalow to another. The cat was some two or three hundred yards away—a speck of white on the sleek, dark asphalt of Zone pavement. The animal was probably the household pet of some officer's family.

The man's dog saw it first. There was a flash of gray, the sparkle of sunlight from a silver collar. And at the dog's heels was Perro, long, gaunt, sinewy guttersnipe from the negro slums of Panama.

The man with the dingy brown cap bellowed angrily, just once. Then his flabby face with the nervous, pale eyes became convulsed. A squeak came from his throat. He opened his mouth, to speak again, and it hung open.

Two flashes of sinew and muscle—one gray and nicely groomed, the other dunnish yellow, with the unerasable marks of his birth upon him—shot up the road. They ran side by side. Streaks of fast flesh—noiseless. Side by side!

Going up a rise that way, the man with the brown cap could see well enough. He threw his dirty cap under foot and trampled on it.

"Can you beat that!" he yelled. "Can you tie that! Mister, do you know what dog that is? Do you? That's Gray Dawn, from Riggis'. Course Dawn never runs in the open like on the track. Nothin' in Panama can beat Dawn on the track. But—"

Then the man suddenly shut up, and looked at Jimmy out of the corners of his eyes. "What kennels is your dog from, Mister?"

"Kennels?" said Jimmy, vaguely.

The man looked at him again, his pale eyes traveling swiftly from Jimmy's head to his feet and back. He picked up his cap. "Don't try to pull the innocent gag! Not on Fred Lupe. What kennels? An' where an' when does he enter?"

"I don't get you," said Jimmy.

The man eyed him in silent disgust, while Jimmy looked at the cat which had climbed the first mango at the curbing. All the way back to Fourth of July Avenue the man eyed Jimmy from under the crumpled brim of his cap. On the far side of the street he suddenly halted, and asked tensely:

"What's the dog held at?"

"Held at?" questioned Jimmy.

"Oh, hell!" the man burst out. "I'm Fred Lupe, I tell you. An' I want to know what your kennels will take for the dog? What's he worth?"

"Worth—oh!" said Jimmy. "I guess Perro's not for sale."

The man snapped a cigarette butt into the gutter. "I knew it!" he spat. "But would three hundred good U. S. berries tempt you? Three hundred—right here, on the spot?"

Jimmy stared at the man. "I—I'll ask Mary," he managed, finally.

"Mary—who?"

"Mary Smith."

"That's definite! Where's she live?"

"Works—works at Wong Fu's Chop Suey Parlors, down the street from Kelley's Ritz."

"I know the place," said the man. "Is that straight now? Straight stuff?"

Jimmy nodded weakly.

FRED LUPE hailed a negro-driven old taxi; and he had been at Wong Fu's and gone on before Jimmy could walk there. It was the slack hour of late afternoon, when the City of Panama seeks the *cantinas* that fringe its streets. Mary met him at the head of the stairs, and her arms encircled Perro's lean neck.

"Three hundred!" she said. "He offered three hundred dollars for Perro, Jimmy! Three—"

"An' you took it?" asked Jimmy.

"No—no, I didn't. You see—"

"Uh-huh," murmured Jimmy slowly. "Uh-huh."

"I must be crazy or something, Jimmy—but I couldn't."

"Uh-huh."

"After that the man wanted to take Perro and train him. He said he was the best trainer in Panama. He said there'd be money in it. He'd rush Perro, out at Riggis'. I—I—"

"Uh-huh," said Jimmy.

"Would you, maybe? The man thought Perro would love the track. It's that kind of a dog's nature, he said; they like to run."

"Well, maybe there's something in that."

They talked about it into the night, at chance moments when Mary wasn't busy. Fred Lupe had said that there was money in it, in the right dog and the right track. But as Jimmy walked home with her—*coches* cost too much, now—he told her she shouldn't decide for that reason.

"I'll get a job," he said. "Sure, I'll get a job pretty soon."

She stopped and looked at him. "Jimmy," she accused, "you haven't even tried to get a berth on some home-bound boat."

"No—no," he confessed. "I'm going to get a job right here. One that'll pay enough money to—well, to—"

They walked on.

"To—what, Jimmy?" she asked, after a while.

"To—to marry you, and take you home with me."

She seemed to consider this for a long time. "But I wouldn't marry you down here, Jimmy. That happens too often. People get married down here; and then, up in the States, it somehow begins to look different to them after a while. See, Jimmy?"

"I'm going to get the job!" said Jimmy.

He kept looking for the job, the next day, and the day after that, tramping the streets of Panama City—dirty, back alleys; winding, crooked lanes with balconies overhead; the main thoroughfares, lined with many merchants of so many different nationalities, tinsel-fronted *cantinas*, sidewalk vendors and strange crowds. But the following morning Mary bade good-by to Perro. Fred Lupe came, at word from her, and took the dog to Tony Riggis' kennels.

Jimmy moved his room to a cheaper place, down on the edge of the negro quarter. A week went by before he at last got a job. But he had it now, he told Mary that night. It was with a mercantile house on one of the best streets. Not much money just at the start; but pretty soon—well, he'd show them that he was worth real wages. And then! Just watch the smoke.

The evening of the next day Jimmy lost the job. The mercantile company had merely needed a day's roustabout work, to straighten and clean up their small warehouse. Two dollars were placed in Jimmy's hand with a Latin flourish, and that was the end of it. He went back to the streets and looked for another job.

Three days later he gave up his room. The tropical daytimes were deadly with sultry heat, but the nights somehow got cold at this time of year. After Jimmy had walked home with Mary, he continued walking the streets until morning. He tried to keep his clothes from looking too bad. But the morning he spent his last ten cents for a shave from a Japanese barber, he broke out bitterly against the whole thing. He cursed and raved and stormed to himself, while he walked through sultry streets, walked on and on nowhere, unheeding.

"What a fool I was, Mary!" he told her later. "What a chump! I can't say it. But what a swell job I did have back in Jamesburg. Oh, gee! Can't I just see it now, though—the workrooms, the benches, the machinery! Everything! An' when you'd washed up, after leaving shop—gosh, wasn't it nice! What a swell bed I had over at Duncan's rooming-house. An' the grub! Oh, gee! An' Jamesburg—it's the best town in the world!"

He told Mary all about Jamesburg; and when he had finished, she said: "It reminds me exactly of Willowbrook, Jimmy. Say, wouldn't I like to be—"

And so it went on and on until Mary had to go to work—that talk filled to bursting with "wouldn't-I-like-to-be's." In the end, although he didn't tell her, Mary sensed what had happened, and tried to loan him five dollars.

"But why not, Jimmy? In ten days, now, Perro will run his first race, Mr. Lupe tells me. He'll win prizes, Jimmy. Of course, he will—lots of them. All the credit belongs to you, you know. If Perro hadn't been with you that day—"

Jimmy shook his head.

NEXT afternoon Lupe saw Mary again, and his report was less encouraging. He didn't know whether Perro would make the grade or not, as he expressed it. He had evidently overestimated the dog's speed that day when Perro had run against Gray Dawn; on the track the dog showed up only average. Against the dozen racing animals Tony Riggis kept he placed center, or a bit behind. That wasn't any too good.

Mary squandered a dollar, later, for a *coche* to go out to the Riggis Kennels; and there Perro fairly took her from her feet. He became as awkward as a foolish puppy, leaping upon her, whining for constant attention. She spent an hour with him, while Lupe looked on and said that affection like that was bad for a dog. A dog—a racing dog especially—should never know fondling or petting, attention of that kind. His job was the track, fast dogs beside him fighting for position, speed and the race. That was all.

Yet Lupe took excellent care of Perro. This was evident. Something of the gutter roughness of that dun-yellow coat was gone, under trained diet and grooming. His muscles were harder, and he was even leaner than before; but with a new suppleness of motion, a powerful, sinewy muscular action evident when he ran. A good dog, all right, Lupe said; but probably nothing more than that. The track would soon enough tell the story. Tony Riggis, tall, dark, saturnine, strolled over, and with an off-hand gesture, offered Mary a couple of hundred for the animal. She shook her head.

"After he's seen the track," Riggis suggested, "you may wish you'd taken it."

As she rode away, back toward town, Mary heard a dog wailing in the kennels. It was Perro, trying to bring her back, giving vent to a full-throated sorrow. Her eyes grew misty as she went on; and she could hear the wail for almost a mile, it seemed. In just a week, now, Perro went to his first race.

JIMMY got a half day's work, and after that two hours one afternoon, helping a negro dravman. He lived on this, a cent and a nickel at a time, still hunting some steady job. Had he had experience, he might have had several. But it never occurred to Jimmy to lie about this. He began to look ragged, seedy. Mary pleaded with him. Those of the street, wise in the tropics, when they noticed him at all, it

was to move away; they knew the down-and-out type when they saw it, those "on the stem." Jimmy lived on fruit, which was very cheap; he hadn't come to begging yet, even if he did have that look.

He lost track of time; he lost track of everything, except Mary. She thrust a bill, unnoticed, into his pocket one night. Furious, he brought it back the next morning. It was this that caused their first quarrel. Jimmy wasn't himself.

He left her and walked away with unseeing eyes, up a crowded thoroughfare. Mary, of course, couldn't realize what a struggle he'd had not to use a dime, say, of that bill. A dime, with savory meat smells coming from every restaurant, every house, around every corner. . . . . Jimmy walked by the big frame hotel where he had once stayed, when he had had good bills sewed into the lining of his coat, in the days just after he'd jumped the *Chet Boller*. He passed on.

"Yo', suh!" said a voice.

Jimmy whirled, and saw one of the negro bellhops of the place beckoning toward him.

"Aint yo' the gentahman, suh, what had Numbah Ninteen 'bout a month ago? . . . . Yes, suh! A lettah fo' yo' inside, suh." The boy was a very good bellhop, and he stood with a tinted palm thrust out, for the coin that Jimmy didn't have.

Jimmy had written Mr. Potts on hotel stationery. The letter that waited inside was from Mr. Potts, of Jamesburg, N. J., U. S. A. Jimmy tore it open. . . . . He reread one paragraph time after time, his eyes glued to it, fascinated. He read it still again. It said:

> . . . . . Mr. Handelson left us unexpectedly within two weeks after your departure, leaving a vacancy that you would have been next in line to fill, at the increase in wage you wished. We have been unable, as yet, to fill the gap satisfactorily, owing to the nature of our work. In case you might still wish the job, cable us direct, and it will be held open for you until the first of the month. . . . .

"What date is this?" Jimmy yelled at the clerk behind the hotel desk.

"The eighteenth."

"Thanks. Can I send a cable collect?"

"I think it can be done. Down the street; turn at the first corner, to the right—"

Jimmy raced out. Then he stopped.

MARY didn't hear about it until seven o'clock that night.

"Jimmy," she commanded, "I've got twenty-nine dollars. I'll get it. Yes, you've got to take it. You've got to! Unless, Jimmy; unless—"

"Unless what?"

"Unless you don't want me. You might never get another job like that, Jimmy. I've got a right to some say, you see, if—well, if we're going to be married."

"But—"

"Perro runs his first race tonight. Have you forgotten? I'll have lots after that, plenty of money from his prizes. Don't you see? Jimmy, you beat it! For twenty-five dollars you'll be able to buy a job from the steward of the *Carinia*. She's home-bound—tomorrow. Oh, get going, Jimmy!"

"Perro races tonight! Tonight—where?"

"The Hipódromo Pacifico. Run for the docks, Jimmy. Buy a job on some upgoing crew. You can get one that way."

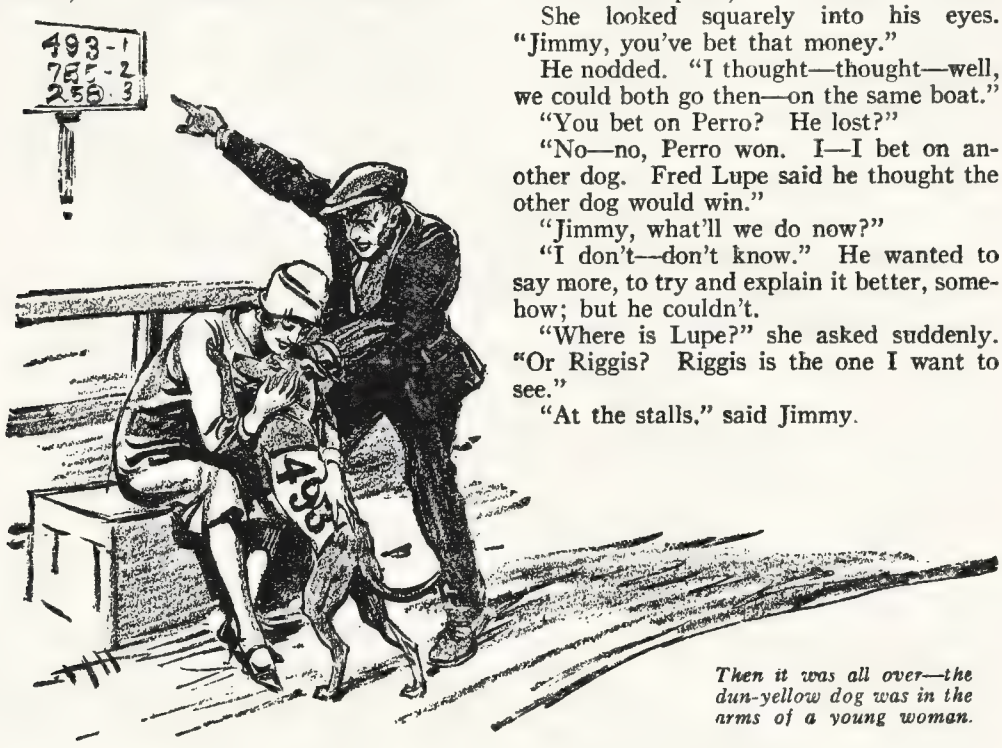
AT eight o'clock the stands at the Hipódromo were filled. It was a minor track, devoted to training, first races and uncatalogued dogs. Anything might happen on it, and usually did. It drew a crowd through its gates when an event of importance was on for this reason. Tonight, at the start of a new season, it had everything on the bill—old dogs, new entries, stars of the past and future alike; the known and the unknown, all unknowably matched.

Trainers, kennel-masters, owners, all of the sporting fraternity of the dog-track, were there. Negro wenches fought for seats on the stands, among Chinese and Hindoos. Panamanians, Spaniards, Indians from the *monte* beyond, French traders, stocky Germans, on their various ways to upcoast plantations, American engineers, drifters, seamen—all of those races, the polyglot peoples, of this city at the crossroads of the seas. They mingled, jostled against each other. Their various languages rose in shrill clamor. And over all hung that excitability of Latin America, and a close, luminous night sky of the tropics.

A bell clanged. It was eight o'clock. The three-sixteenths-mile track, fast and smooth, was suddenly flooded with light. The mechanical rabbit, fastened to a rail against the outside wall of the track, was visible now from the stands. It was a grotesque creature, a crouching silhouette of its namesake in metal, painted white; and its eye was lighted by a tiny electric

globe. It moved rapidly back and forth on the rail while the mechanism was being tested.

A bell clanged again. Silence fell over the stands. The dogs were coming out. Each had a saddle-cloth with a number affixed, in the colors of his kennels. A



Then it was all over—the dun-yellow dog was in the arms of a young woman.

trainer led each animal. They were put into the starting box—whining, nervous, eager—beautiful, slim creatures that furnish a sport that is faster than that sport of kings.

The silence in the stands was tense. The mechanism of the track began to hum, rattle, as the rabbit circled the course, once, swiftly. The whine of a dog was heard, a second breaking in. As the rabbit passed again, the long door of the starting-box shot open.

Eight dogs left its cover as one. The stands were on their feet, jostling, swaying, clawing, fighting, to see over one another. A negress, clasping a pink book-stub, shouted, screamed:

"Vaya! Vaya, Perro!"

PERRO ran in the first race, and he was scheduled to run again in the sixth, barring mishap. That would be at about ten-fifteen. It was ten minutes after the hour when Mary arrived at the Hipódromo Pacifico, because Wong Fu hadn't it in his Chinese heart to let her off earlier. As she flew in at the narrow main gate, she collided with Jimmy.

They halted, stood apart. Jimmy opened his mouth to speak, but words didn't come.

She looked squarely into his eyes. "Jimmy, you've bet that money."

He nodded. "I thought—thought—well, we could both go then—on the same boat."

"You bet on Perro? He lost?"

"No—no, Perro won. I—I bet on another dog. Fred Lupe said he thought the other dog would win."

"Jimmy, what'll we do now?"

"I don't—don't know." He wanted to say more, to try and explain it better, somehow; but he couldn't.

"Where is Lupe?" she asked suddenly. "Or Riggis? Riggis is the one I want to see."

"At the stalls," said Jimmy.

She had disappeared into the press of humanity jammed against the betting-booths before Jimmy realized what she was about to do. He followed, then. Once he saw a corner of her little hat—over many other hats, and heads, and shoulders. He shouted after her through the mighty hum of many voices. If she heard, she did not pause. . . . Then she was lost altogether.

At the stalls, Fred Lupe shrugged his shoulders. He was busy with Gray Dawn; another trainer had Perro for this race. No, Lupe had seen neither, neither Miss Smith nor Riggis. Jimmy knew that he lied.

The bell that officially closed the betting on Race Six clanged. Dogs were moved out. Spectators were turning back, pushing, crowding, toward the stands. Eight negroes argued violently in a group because the headsman of their choice had proved traitor and placed the collected pool of two dollars on the wrong dog. The

flood-lights suddenly illuminated the track beyond, for the Sixth.

Then Jimmy saw her. She had just come out of a little frame office at one end of the betting booths. She closed the door slowly, weakly, as he pushed through to her.

"Mary! Mary, you didn't—"

She nodded. Her face was white, her hands clenched. Tight fingers held the stub of a pink ticket. A stub from booth Number three, paying five to one, winner, on dog Number 493, in the Sixth. She trembled suddenly as if she might fall.

"It was the only way he'd do, Jimmy. The only way! He'd only give me a hundred on Perro, too—a hundred this way. And Jimmy, if—if Perro loses, he wont be mine any more. He'll belong to Tony Riggis."

She held up the pink stub. Number 493 was Perro's number. It was listed so on the little cardboard program of the track. Perro's position was fourth in the Sixth Race. In a little square the program showed this, along with his number, the owner's and the trainer's names.

Jimmy didn't say anything.

IN first position was Gray Dawn. In the Sixth, Gray Dawn, veteran, idol of the track, reputed by many to be the fastest dog in Panama, ran his first race of the evening, matched against Perro and an untried field. That was the reason Perro's number paid five-to-one, on a straight ticket. Others listed greater odds. . . . . Jimmy couldn't tell Mary—not just then. Silent, they turned toward the track, down before the stands through a motley crowd to the rail. . . . .

The starting bell had sounded, and the mechanical rabbit was rattling swiftly around the track on its preliminary circuit. In a hushed, great voice the stands echoed with a name—Gray Dawn. Gray Dawn! They knew the dog—big silvery greyhound from the Riggis Kennels. . . . . No wonder Perro's ticket paid five for one in this race! No wonder Tony Riggis had wanted it this way!

"He races against Gray Dawn, Mary," whispered Jimmy from his throat, at last.

"I know," said Mary. "I know."

The rabbit shot under them, vibrating the rail. The long trapdoor of the starting-box shot up. The dogs were off—eight slim, fast creatures. Twenty feet beyond the box, a blanket would have covered them. Just ahead, his long silvery neck and shoulders well in the lead, was Gray Dawn.

The stands rose with a vibrant rumble and murmur. Many voices mingled—praying, shouting, sobbing, whispering.

"Gray Dawn! Come on, yo' Dawn!"

The dogs had swung the first turn after that ridiculous rabbit with an electric eye. Silent—shadows of the shadow track.

It seemed that the blood was pounding—great blows—across Jimmy's forehead. Mary's hands clutched the rail before her. Her body was stiff, unmoving, breathless.

The dogs had turned the end. Across the track they were strung into file. Jimmy could distinguish only one numeral. A white number "I" against the Riggis colors. Gray Dawn's silvery form led!

Swift, lean shadows in file, they went down the far line of the track.

Then the posts of the inner rail cut the view into serried flashes. The dogs were swinging the far end. Unbelievably fast! The lead was bunched again. They were cutting in on each other on the last turn. A fighter slashed at lean flanks before him, lost pace and fell behind. . . . . A hush fell over the stands, a throbbing, whispering hush, while the dogs shot into the straightaway.

The hush became strained silence, stiff, under the softness of a tropical night. No one could see the numerals yet. Three dogs were placing, fighting for a lead in the last fifty yards. A silvery gray, a dun-yellow, a splotched brindle—

"Perro!" Mary shrieked into the silence. *"Perro!"*

The stands as though in great echo broke into a clamoring roar. Gray Dawn still led. But the dun-yellow had crept up on his flanks. The brindle, in ten yards, dropped a length behind.

"Perro! Perro! Perro!"

THEN it was all over. But something had happened down at the edge of the track. Just after crossing the line before the judge's stand, the dun-yellow dog had leaped the rail. The stands saw it plainly. The dog was in the arms of a young woman now—while on the score-board the number "493" was chalked up in the winner's position.

Next evening Wong Fu himself filled in the sudden vacancy at his cashier's desk. And a slim dun-colored dog chaperoned two who sat in the moonlight by the rail of the northbound *Carinia*.

Free Lances in Diplomacy

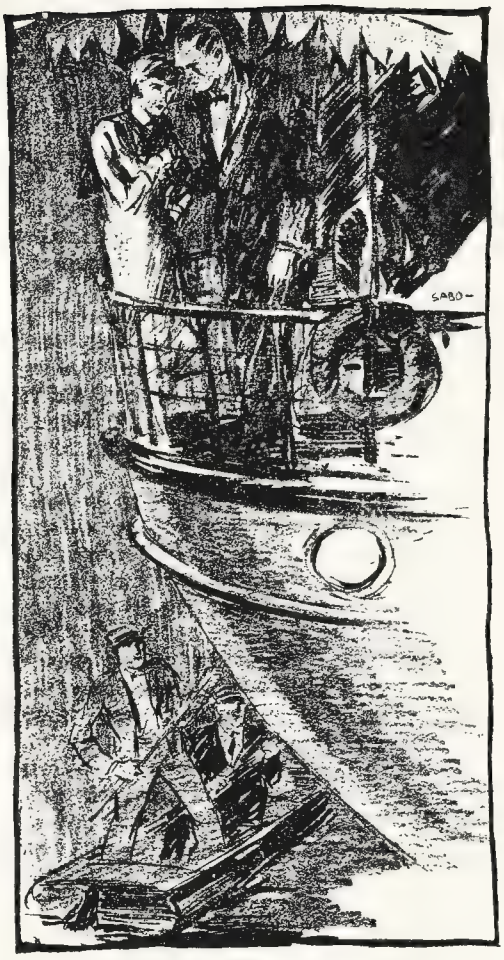
By CLARENCE HERBERT NEW

AGAIN Mr. New displays his intimate and accurate knowledge of foreign affairs and peoples—and his great gifts as a fiction writer.

Illustrated by Joseph Sabo

IN a spacious room overlooking the Danube at Belgrade three men were discussing a matter of state importance. As the city always has been a nest of intrigue, they were seated by the big closed window with the width of the room between them and the bolted door, and were talking in tones so low that it would have been impossible to overhear them from any place a spy could get. Two were men of affairs—Cabinet Ministers. The third was younger—yet not irresponsibly so. Dovarescu looked a possible thirty, with a fresh handsome face which had brought him the attentions of many women; but he was nearly ten years older than that and was what would be termed in America fairly "hard-boiled." Miliunov was summing up the situation—with what they hoped to bring about.

"The alliance between Il Duce and Roumania has been definitely agreed to—that we know. And Albania is Italy's pawn in diplomatic alignment. Now, Bulgaria and what's left of Hungary, with possibilities in the direction of Poland, complete what is the Little Entente of today—so that we, of Jugo-Slavia, are hemmed in on all sides. If we are successful in our understanding with Kemal Pasha, it will strengthen us materially—and I think we may depend upon a sympathetic attitude in France.



The woman was speaking. "How much would he pay to have a situation like that kept quiet?"

There is, during the past two months, what looks like the forming of an Entente between England and France, with a disposition to give Poland economic protection against Moscow, or possibly more than that if necessary. Italian ambition, today, is becoming a possible menace to France and England, particularly, with the Little Entente alliance. Now, if we should be able to bring about moral support and diplomatic pressure in our favor both from France and England, it would strengthen our position until we would have little to fear from Italian aggression—or Russian, either. Failing that, we may be driven into some sort of alliance with Moscow, which would be suicidal in the long run. So you see, my friend, what we hope from you."

"I think I grasp that—fully. I am to confer with men you have mentioned to

me in Paris and London, but it is to appear as a visit of courtesy in each case, as I am supposed to have met them here and entertained them. You wish me to go by the Rapide Orientale?"

"*Au contraire!* Entirely too much risk! You see that yacht lying down there in the Save—beyond the Budapest steamer-wharf?"

"The yacht of M. Jules Desmoulins—millionaire sportsman of Paris and Bordeaux? Of course, the whole city knows of M. Desmoulins and his yacht which recently came up through the Iron Gates. He was at the New Konak with His Majesty, last night."

"Er—quite so. M. Desmoulins is—our good Naratz, of the Paris Embassy, with a carefully grown black beard and somewhat padded clothing. The yacht was chartered by him with Government funds and has just made a pleasure-cruise through the Mediterranean. To the best of our knowledge, he hasn't been suspected—passes for exactly what he claims to be. Very good! He meets you here—you are *bon vivant*, popular with the women, a man of his own type. He invites you to cruise with him.

"You will use the utmost caution, both of you, not to become embroiled in quarrels over women or to visit women in houses you're not sure of—particularly in Stamboul and the Mediterranean ports. It is possible that the supposed Desmoulins may invite women who have been properly vouched for to accompany you on the yacht for short runs between ports—because that is in keeping with his assumed character; and you will invite one or two yourself, just to carry out the impression of a similar type—off on a vacation from your commercial affairs. You've not been associated with the Government at all in the public mind—are supposed to be merely a rich young sportsman who has inherited some very profitable linen-mills. Certain passwords will bring any of the crew to your assistance if necessary; they are picked men—Slavs of our own party."

"H-m-m—your arrangement seems to have been very carefully figured out, M. Miliunov. I really can't see a flaw in it. I take my own valet and chauffeur, of course—not only for their obvious duties but as guards if necessary; and as I travel with no papers whatever, they'll find nothing even if they are bribed to search my luggage. In the event that I secure initialed memoranda, it would appear to me safer if I turn it over to our Paris ambassador for deposit in his vaults, rather than attempt bringing it back here with me."

ON their way down the Danube,—past Gratz, where two of the Austrian Lloyd steamers were lying, and around through the Black Sea to the Bosporus,—Naratz, as the supposed French yachtsman, described the various people to whom he had brought letters of introduction on the outward trip, and whom they would probably entertain on the *Alexandra* at the ports where they touched. Among others he mentioned an English family related to the legation people at Stamboul.

"You'll find the Graemes charming people, Dovarescu—and they usually have staying with them English or Continental friends who are equally worth while. The villa is about halfway up the bluff, commanding a magnificent view up and down the Bosporus from its terrace—in fact, with a good prism-binocular, one may recognize whoever happens to be sitting there as you pass."

When the *Alexandra* passed into the Bosporus two days later, they saw half a dozen people on the Graemes' terrace and waved to them—receiving a prompt flutter of handkerchiefs in return, though the party didn't know whose yacht she was until their host joined them a moment later. Being himself a yachtsman and recognizing the club-pennant without a glass, Graeme satisfied their curiosity at once.

"That'll be M. Jules Desmoulins' *Alexandra*—owner an' party on board. Millionaire Frenchman, with commercial interests in Paris an' Bordeaux. Fetched out letters to us when he was here a month ago—been havin' a look-see at some of the Black Sea ports, I fancy, an' possibly went up the Danube a bit. He spoke of tryin' that—asked what draft the Austrian Lloyd boats had—the ones which go above the Iron Gates. Most delightful chap, don't you know—been everywhere, well-bred, good comp'ny. His cruisin'-guests appear to be much the same type. Fancy he'll be droppin' in upon us unless he's goin' straight through. . . . . No—there goes his mud-hook—same place he anchored before. Takes about all the cable he's got, I fancy—considerable depth, an' a stiff current if the wind's north."

As two of the afternoon guests were leaving, there was a general move to go inside, but a handsome woman of possibly

The Serb put up a struggle, but three were too much for him.

twenty-eight or thirty settled back in her bamboo deck-chair and glanced at one of the men, imperceptibly, in a way that presently brought him back to pull up a chair by her side and light a cigarette.

"Something on your mind, Nora?"

"Yes—something a bit puzzling—can't quite make it out. We've done very well of late, and I suppose it even might be to our advantage if we remained inactive for several months—until some recent occurrences, for example, have been forgotten. But I've a feeling—can't explain it, you know—as if opportunity were drifting our way in a fog. Something which might be really worth while. Not a few piffling thousands, but a really interesting stake. We met this Desmoulins at Gib, as you remember, nearly two months ago—had tea on his yacht with the Marshalls. Something about the man struck me as peculiar at the time—as if I'd seen him before in different surroundings, possibly with a different name. Were you struck by anything like that?"

"Not in the man himself—appeared to be the perfectly obvious sort. But one little occurrence on that yacht did make a vague impression which I'd forgotten until you mentioned this. I was strolling about the yacht—very tidy craft—an' overheard three of the crew talkin' among themselves in Serbian, which I know well enough to order a dinner. And Desmoulins happened to come for'ard just then to see if anything was fouling his cable, and in passing, chucked a brief question at those three men in the same language. Rather odd, it seemed to me."

"H-m-m—wait a bit! This Desmoulins has been somewhere around the Black Sea for a month. He asked the Graemes about the depth of water in the Danube above the Iron Gates—which obviously meant Belgrade. Do you know, I'm beginning to have a bit of curiosity about M'sieur Desmoulins and whatever guests he may have on board at this moment. Doubtless he'll be up here this evening with them, to see the Graemes. We must wangle an invitation to go aboard his yacht—better yet, to cruise on her a week if she happens to be going our way."

AS the standing of the Graemes around Stamboul was in itself a guarantee concerning anyone admitted to their house, both the supposed Desmoulins and Dovarescu saw that acceptance by them in their assumed characters of wealthy sportsmen would spread a good deal farther than the Constantinople neighborhood and go far toward creating just the impression they wished; so they ran up to the Rumeli Hissar landing immediately after dinner and were soon chatting with the house-party on the terrace, in the moonlight. During the first half-hour of general talk, Sir John Graeme casually mentioned that he'd been hoping some old

friends of his would also join them—from a larger yacht than the *Alexandra,* anchored farther down.

"You mean that deep-water cruiser flying the Royal Yacht Club flag, Sir John? We were examining her with our glasses —couldn't quite make out the name. By her rig and size, she reminds me of the Comte de Dyvnaint's famous cruiser."

"Quite so, M'sieur. She'll be the *Ranee Sylvia* right enough. It's His Lordship an' the Earl of St. Ives I'm rather expectin' this evening—they always look me up unless rushed for time. I fancy that'll be the *Ranee's* power-launch running up to our boat-landing now! If so, they'll be with us very shortly."

IF Lady Nora Shottwell or Mr. Ferdinand Prosby—who knew both Earls by sight—expected anything like snobbishness or consciousness of their wide reputation, they were soon disillusioned. In a few moments Lady Nora found Earl Trevor seated by her side in the semi-darkness, as the moon went behind a cloud—lighting a cigarette from the match she struck for him.

"Seen you about London, you know. Lady Nora—who?"

"Shottwell—but I doubt if you'd know the name."

"Something familiar about it. Er—weren't you in Australia or the States for some years—solicitors advertisin' for heirs to your estate, or something of the sort?"

"Your Lordship's memory is much better than I thought. Mild case of amnesia after a fever—forgot things for three years, then slowly got my memory back. Do all news items stick in your mind like that?"

"Of course not. Cultivate memory in a mechanical way, you know, because it helps immensely in commercial affairs—an' one always speculates a bit about missin' people, d'ye see."

AS they chatted, pleasantly, for perhaps half an hour, Lady Nora was entirely unaware that His Lordship was quietly studying her—asking of this or that mutual acquaintance in London or Paris, ascertaining without her realizing it, that she, Prosby, Sir Basil Trundar and the Hon. Harriet Wendman, intimate friends at home, had been doing the Mediterranean together. Sir Basil and the Honorable Harriet were then in Athens but expected to join the other two within forty-eight hours. His Lordship vaguely recalled some gossip in the London clubs about Sir Basil and some of his friends.

Later the Earl renewed his acquaintance with Dovarescu, whom he knew must be some years older than he looked. During their chat the Serb asked a few questions concerning men who were prominent in England—some of them commercially, some, in politics. He explained that his father had known them quite well and that it was his intention to call upon them if the cruise was extended that far.

It occurred to Trevor that this young Dovarescu had more balance and a wider grasp of international affairs than his reputation as a young sportsman implied. He began to speculate upon certain possibilities also occurring to him—and presently asked the younger man if he would care to have a few letters to intimate friends of His Lordship. M. Dovarescu was not too eager in his acceptance of this suggestion, but he admitted that it would please him immensely to present such letters if he had the opportunity—even if the Earl's friends received him merely as a matter of courtesy.

When Trevor and his friend Lammerford returned to the *Ranee Sylvia,* that night, they drifted into a discussion of the ones they had met at the Graemes'.

"What's your idea of Lady Nora, Lammy?"

"A much brighter, more capable woman than she's willing to have generally supposed. Well-bred, excellent taste, rather brilliant mind—looks out for Number One every time, I fancy. A woman who could be dangerous if she saw any good reason for it. What's her last name?"

"Shottwell—the missing woman those family solicitors were advertising for a year or two ago."

"You mean—not the Lady Nora Shottwell who turned up missing for six or eight years—last seen in Australia? Nons'nse!"

"Why so?"

"Hmph! *That* Lady Nora left Albany, Western Australia, six years ago on the *Warracoomba* for Southampton via Durban an' Cape Town. Her fiancé waved good-by to her from the shore-launch as she was leaning over the rail—young sheep-ranger. As you know, the *Warracoomba* never reached Durban—never has been heard from—not even a scrap of wreckage from her picked up at sea."

"Happen to know the man she was engaged to?"

"Aye—quite well. Sold his sheep-range—went into wine-growing in Spain an' Portugal—makes Gib his headquarters—likely to run across him there at any time."

"How old a girl was Lady Nora? Who were her heirs?"

"That's what those solicitors were trying to ascertain. She wasn't married to Byrne, though she expected to be six months later—never had been married, as far as he knew—an' the last of her line. Property reverts to the Crown, as I understand it."

"If she dies without heirs. But she's in possession of it now, and I fancy she'll look out for the heirs, one way or another."

"You mean to say the solicitors have accepted her? They're balmy! Why—I could have Byrne meet us at Gib on the way back an' tell us positively that Lady Nora Shottwell went to Davy Jones with everyone else on the *Warracoomba!*"

"I wish you would have him meet us—without knowing why. There was something about this woman, tonight, which made me instinctively distrust her when there was no apparent reason for it—possibly her being with that chap Prosby, who isn't quite—*pukka*—if you ask me. She seemed a good bit int'rested in that young Serb, Dovarescu, who isn't as young as he looks—nor as frivolous, either. Suppose, just for argum'nt, that she got it into her head he was really a political, traveling in a roundabout way on some diplomatic mission? Eh? And either belongs to opposing int'rests—means to block him—or thinks there may be a chance to feather her own nest in such a situation? What?"

"Hmph! It's entirely possible that Dovarescu *is* a political—his father was a Cabinet Minister, and the son is by no means the irresponsible young spendthrift he's said to be. This Lady Nora is unquestionably an impostor—but so clever a one that she's hoodwinked those solicitors. I fancy it might take some doing to dislodge her or prove anything criminal. Do you know—a number of peculiar things have been happening in London during the past two years. Prominent men an' women appear to have gotten into the clutches of a clever gang who bled them without mercy—completely ruined at least half a dozen. The victims are afraid to give any testimony—nobody else can get any. I'd really give something to run down a lot of scoundrels like that because they're so dev'lish far-sighted an' diffic'lt to catch!"

NEXT day, when Trevor was chatting with Sir John again, he tried to find out how well his friend knew Lady Nora and her antecedents, but Graeme appeared positive that the young woman and Prosby were of unimpeachable standing and assured His Lordship that he would like Sir Basil and the Honorable Harriet when they turned up in time for the ball Desmoulins was giving on the *Alexandra,* that night. There had been some talk, he said, of the four being invited to join the yacht-party as far as Marseilles. This point was being discussed between Desmoulins and his Serbian guest that afternoon, Desmoulins making the suggestion in the privacy of the saloon.

"It would give just about the right color to our cruise, *mon ami,* and possibly secure for us invitations to meet Cabinet men at Lady Nora's house in London. Of course, when it comes to any serious interview, our ambassador will drop a hint in advance of your call, but it will be an advantage to meet some of those men socially before getting to that point—evidence to them of our discretion, at least."

"Oh, I quite agree upon that point, Naratz, and Lady Nora will prove a most charming shipmate; but I place more value upon the letters promised me by Earl Trevor and his friend St. Ives. They are very powerful men—quite friendly toward us, I think. There is some risk in having women cruising with us, but we could scarcely pick out any with better credentials than friends of the Graemes."

THE ball on the yacht, that night, was a decided success—being talked of throughout Stamboul, even reported in the London and Paris news-sheets. And it went far toward strengthening for the Serbs exactly the impression they wished to produce, of young and irresponsible sportsmen who knew nothing of diplomatic affairs and cared less. The *Alexandra* was to leave for Naples the second day following—it being understood that the big Trevor yacht might weigh anchor about the same time. The night after the ball, when the cruising-guests were on board, stowing their luggage and getting settled, was unusually breathless and still for that locality, a thick fog drifting slowly down the Bosporus from the Black Sea. With atmos-

pheric conditions and temperature just right, such fogs have been known to last for thirty hours, although it doesn't happen very frequently. There is always a current in the Bosporus, but on such nights the water has a glassy surface with the force of the push some feet below it; and the *caiques,* by keeping close inshore, have little difficulty in getting well up toward the Black Sea entrance.

This condition of air and water prompted the two Earls to drop a small and noiseless electric launch into the water and run up through the fog to where the other yacht was anchored. Knowing the Bosporus as they both did, they had no difficulty in finding her or in circling around close to her sides without being seen. By standing up in the launch, their heads were just level with the saloon and stateroom ports, the deck being four or five feet above them. Two quartermasters were standing under the electric bulb at the top of the accommodation-ladder to assist possible visitors coming off in *caiques* or shore-launches, but they couldn't see the lower grating. Leaning over the rail at the stern, a man and woman were talking in low tones. The woman appeared to be going over certain points to check them off.

"You've managed to overhear every man of the crew when he was speaking Serbian—so there's no longer a doubt that everybody on board except guests is a Serb—though our wires from Paris show that she was chartered to a Bordeaux Frenchman. Dovarescu's father was a Cabinet Minister—he has grown up in the political atmosphere. Instead of an irresponsible spendthrift, he gives the impression of a capable man considerably older than he looks. If the King and his cabinet had been sending a special envoy to France and England in the usual way by the Rapide, it's self-evident that he would have risked being waylaid or had traps planned for him at every step; it would have been impossible to give him the appearance of a casual traveler going to Paris on business. As a yachtsman with plenty of leisure to spend in Mediterranean ports as he pleases, an entirely different impression is created."

"Oh, I fancy there'll be little argum'nt as to what he is, or his ultimate object. But just how would you turn it to our advantage?"

"Well, what would happen to any Serb caught hobnobbing with an Italian statesman in the present status of diplomatic affairs? Or even with one of the Muscovites? What chance would he have for conversations in behalf of Jugo-Slavia with French or British statesmen?"

"Not a chance in the world! Nor would any other Serb envoy for some time!"

"Precisely! Well, then—how much would he pay to have a situation like that kept quiet? Eh?"

"Oh, the devil! One grasps it, now! My compliments to your clever brain, Nora! Only point is—how much can the beggar scrape up?"

"If he gives an accurate statement of the hole he's in to either of his Ambassadors, there'll be a stiffish amount of Government funds to keep the matter under cover until he can go home and be forgotten. Now, we pull out for Naples in the morning—where, fortunately, we've been keeping one of our party for just such possibilities as this. She's still living in that old villa back of St. Elmo which we've used before, successfully. I fancy the thing might be pulled off there with little difficulty—the place is Seventeenth Century, but has been put in comfortable and attractive condition—just the sort of surroundings in which one would expect to find an Italian of old family living in somewhat reduced circumstances but still able to entertain creditably. The sort of house where Il Duce himself might go occasionally without seeming out of place. Our only real difficulty will be to find some man resembling him closely enough for our purpose—"

"Basil can do it so well that, in a room not too brilliantly lighted, he would pass with very little question. He's very nearly the same build—without the mustache, his face is much the same shape—a bit of make-up, an' he'll surprise you a lot!"

"H-m-m—Basil hadn't occurred to me, but he should do very well for the part. Night-photography would account for any little difference which might be noticed. Very good! I must get the Serb to write some verses for me—or an essay on love. We'll need some of his handwriting."

AS the pair then turned and made their way forward to the saloon-companion, the two in the launch ran down to their own yacht and discussed various ways in which it might be possible for them to interfere in Dovarescu's behalf. After coming to a tentative decision they retired, and

He had been carried, unconscious but with eyes half-open, and placed in a chair by a table.

the *Ranee* weighed anchor in the early morning some hours before the *Alexandra* got away—reaching Naples more than a day ahead and giving opportunity for making certain arrangements in advance.

Hard-headed as the two Serbs were, their women guests made a strong impression upon them. Dovarescu dropped a warning to his supposed host, one night:

"We're getting in a bit deep, old chap! Perhaps these women had better leave us at Naples. I can see how it is with you—and I'm losing my own head a bit. If the women even so much as hinted that they needed protection, Sir Basil and Prosby would be down on us like a shot—but they're not relations and they'll not interfere unless they're asked to, though I don't think they relish our monopolizing the ladies over-much. What do you say?"

"Well—it seems to me the only question is whether they're what they appear to be. It seems unlikely that any friends of the Graemes can be very far out—and they're what I call dev'lish good company. I don't know yet how far they'd go!"

WHEN they anchored off the Strada Santa Lucia in the Bay of Naples, two friends of their guests came off in a shore launch to greet them and extend an invitation for all to dine with the lady at her villa next evening. Her escort, Il Cavaliere Fornalli, also mentioned entertainment at his own *palazzo* upon another occasion. Seeing no reason for refusing these courteous invitations, the yachtsmen expressed their appreciation and prevailed upon the visitors to remain aboard for dinner that night.

At the Signora di Calaggio's villa next evening they ate a most excellent meal and played cards with a few other guests who went home by eleven—Desmoulins taking some of the men down aboard the yacht. After they left, Dovarescu had gone with the Signora into one of the rooms overlooking the Bay when she excused herself for a moment and left him seated upon a little balcony. The slight click made by the shooting of a bolt in the door-lock made him peer back through the window and then step inside. At first the room seemed to be empty—but when he turned to look at the other window, a burly figure slid out from behind the curtains and a hand grasped his throat. The Serb was

a powerful man and put up considerable of a struggle, but three were too much for him. He was shoved against the wall in one corner—a silk handkerchief was stuffed into his mouth, and his leg was jammed against some sharp projection which pricked like a stiletto. In a moment or two things began to turn black, and he lost consciousness.

When he very slowly began to recover his senses, he was huddled down on the floor in one corner and there seemed to be a desperate fight going on in the room. Some one had smashed the electrolier—bits of broken glass lying about the floor—so that the only light came from the moon which shone in through the long French windows. Twice a lance of flame streaked across the room followed by the sharp report of a pistol; then three figures appeared to tear themselves loose from the struggling knot and leaped down from the balcony while the others ran out to fire another couple of shots after them. Then they came back into the room, opened the door and called for lights, which a couple of nervous footmen brought in, half expecting to be murdered as they did so.

Dovarescu was now sitting up groggily, identifying the men in the room as Prosby, Sir Basil and the Cavaliere. In another moment, they had put him in a chair and were looking for injuries. Except for a redness around the throat where he had been choked senseless, as he thought, there appeared to be no injuries whatever. Then the ladies came in and there were expressions of profound regret for the occurrence. It appeared that the Signora had found the door bolted, upon her return, and had heard the sounds of a struggle inside—so she ran back for assistance, and the men had smashed in the door. As Dovarescu felt none the worse for his experience, which was supposed to have been pure banditry without regard to any particular person in the villa, a few glasses of champagne made him consider the whole occurrence as more of a joke than a serious matter. He'd had no scrap of paper upon him relating to state affairs, and the bandits had been attacked before they'd had a chance to get his money, studs or watch. Altogether he could only consider his hostess and their yacht-guests in the light of timely rescuers who had instantly come to his assistance without thought of personal risk—which of course placed them even higher in his estimation. What actually occurred the time he was unconscious was this:

The sharp something against which his thigh had been jammed in the struggle was a hypodermic-needle which put him completely out for nearly an hour. As soon as he was unconscious, he had been carried into a room at the rear of the villa and placed in a chair by a long table—one arm resting upon it and supporting his head, the other hanging by his side. A man may be entirely unconscious with his eyes half open, and in such condition may be so placed in a chair that he appears to be merely slumped down in a relaxed position. His clothes, of course, had been carefully brushed and rearranged. On the table near his hand were four packages of Italian and English bank-notes—back of them, empty champagne bottles in a silver cooler and two partly drained glasses—a cigarette between his fingers. Standing at the other side of the table in formal evening clothes was a man whom—though only the side of his face was visible—anyone would have identified as an Italian statesman known in every quarter of the globe. It is true there might have been enough doubt to permit of a denial from the statesman himself when he saw the picture—but that would have been discounted by anyone as a natural precaution. Nobody would have questioned the identity. In the background was a figure with a speed-camera on a tripod, and another with a thousand-watt flood-light. This light was turned on for several minutes—until the poses were satisfactory and several negatives exposed from different angles.

THERE was, however, another feature in the affair which the Signora and her accomplices never suspected until certain photos were produced in London. The three bandits were fishermen procured from Pozzuoli to put up a fake struggle with no injury to anybody, and well paid for the job—having an impression that it was for the cinema. But when they approached the villa from the rear, they were arrested by a file of Bersaglieri and hustled off for a month's imprisonment. As they had been paid in advance, they took this philosophically—the conspirators never saw them again. Their places, however, were taken by taller, stronger men, dressed exactly as they had been and closely resembling them in anything but a strong light.

It had been these substitutes who locked the door, attacked Dovarescu and jabbed the hypodermic into him. When he was being carried into the other room, these men picked up something they had fetched with them and stealthily followed along the wide hall of the villa, which was now unlighted. The Signora and her accomplices never thought of closing the big hall door after them—and when a hooded thousand-watt light is used, every shadow outside of its rays is so intensely black that objects in plain sight are invisible to anyone who has been looking at anything within the angle of illumination. During the time occupied in posing and shooting inside the room, the bandits in the dark hall exposed five hundred feet of movie-film covering every move of each person in the whole proceeding. Then the supposed brigands stole away with their camera and lowered it carefully to another man below the little balcony—so that they had taken their positions for the final mix-up when the Serb was fetched back again. After leaping from the balcony unharmed, they made their way, laughingly, down to Santa Lucia and went off in a launch to the *Ranee Sylvia,* which was anchored well out in the Bay.

IT had been generally understood that Desmoulins would take the *Alexandra* up to Marseilles after leaving Naples and drop his guests there—but when he said it would take but two or three days longer to make Bordeaux, with a few hours stop at Gib, if they cared to go that far, there was a general vote in favor of skipping Marseilles.

The *Ranee Sylvia,* leaving Naples twelve hours earlier, reached Gib a full day ahead of the other yacht and had run across the Strait to Tangier when she dropped anchor off the mole. In a few minutes a fine-looking man who spoke perfect French and introduced himself as Martyn Byrne came in a launch to inquire if his friend the Earl of St. Ives had accompanied them from Naples. He said he had run around from Cadiz to meet the Earl but was uncertain as to whether he was cruising with Earl Trevor or had been invited by M. Desmoulins to accompany him as far as Gib—the gazettes having mentioned that the yacht-parties were mutual friends cruising on pretty much the same itinerary. As his being a friend of Lord Lammerford's was a sufficient guarantee of standing, the pseudo-Desmoulins took him aft to where the ladies were sitting and asked him to have tea with them—finding the wine-grower most excellent company. As all of them were quite familiar with the "Rock" and had only put in for mail, the yacht left soon after Byrne went ashore —was out of sight before the *Ranee Sylvia* dropped anchor again. Knowing their time was limited, Byrne came off at once for a chat on the after-deck.

"Well, old chap—did you get a look-see at the lady?" asked Trevor.

"Talked for an hour or more with a dev'lish clever, good-lookin' woman who was introduced to me as Lady Nora Shottwell. As that poor girl is at the bottom of the Indian Ocean an' there's no possibility of there being another woman in the British Peerage with that title,—spinster, without heirs,—this woman is clearly an impostor. Of course I don't know what she gave those solicitors by way of proof or evidence—an' I'd not care to make the accusation publicly because it would be too diffic'lt to locate those who knew her in Australia six or eight years ago—couldn't fetch 'em to England as witnesses an' confront the woman. Simply my bare word against hers—she's likely to be well intrenched by this time. But I'll do this, if you like: I'll write out a deposition that she's not the Lady Nora to whom I was engaged—who was known to a number of people in Sydney an' Melbourne—then swear to it before a notary. The little snapshot you showed me is the woman on the *Alexandra,* right enough—but *not* Lady Nora Shottwell. I'll write that statement on the back of the photo."

"That an' your deposition will be quite sufficient, Byrne—you've put us under some obligation to you an' we'll have no hesitation whatever in exposing her as soon as we dig up a bit more evidence in London. Can't you cruise around home with us?"

"Not if you're in a hurry—but I'll join you a bit later in London an' give any assistance I can in running down this proposition. Something criminal about it, of course—very cleverly handled, I fancy. By the way, you met Desmoulins an' his Serb friend in Stamboul, according to the gazettes. Anything strike you as familiar about Desmoulins?"

"Why—vaguely—once or twice. Mere resemblance, I fancy."

"Your Lordship is familiar with the per-

sonnel at the Jugo-Slavian Embassy in Paris, I suppose?"

This last to his friend, Earl Lammerford.

"Oh—aye. Was formerly an F. O. man myself, you know."

"Ever chat with Naratz enough to fix his features in your memory?"

"Oh, I *say!* My word! That accounts for the vague familiarity—I've wondered, once or twice, how Desmoulins would look without that Vandyke! He's Naratz, of course—an' this whole bally cruise of the *Alexandra* becomes a lot more understandable. Naratz wouldn't be chosen as a special envoy because he lacks the breeding and qualities which Dovarescu inherits naturally. This cruise of two pleasure-loving yachtsmen is a capital blind—and they're pretty well guarded every step of the way as far as their destination by their picked crew. Lady Nora and her companions would appear to be a gang of blackmailers who somehow have reached this same conclusion and mean to compromise Dovarescu so ruinously that he'll be forced to buy their silence with a rather staggering sum unless we manage to help him out of that. They tried a pretty rotten game in Naples which would have finished him if we hadn't taken a hand. Faith—I fancy we'd best crowd on steam an' reach Brest ahead of the *Alexandra*—or possibly Cherbourg instead."

LADY NORA hinted rather plainly that she and her friends would be glad to continue their cruise beyond Bordeaux—matters having reached a point of intimacy with their host which naturally would have suggested this. But, to their amazement, Desmoulins showed more strength than they had credited him with. He was desolated, filled with most painful regrets, but guests were expected at Bordeaux from another boat, and they were of a different sort altogether—church people, in fact. The two parties simply wouldn't mix, and the new arrivals were family friends whom it wouldn't be good policy to antagonize. So the conspirators were set ashore in spite of their hints and displeasure. Prosby immediately went up to Brest by train to keep the Serbs under observation while the others hurried on to Paris. But the *Alexandra* didn't put in at Brest. Naratz and Dovarescu were now hard-headed diplomats with a difficult mission to accomplish —and were taking no chances. The yacht put Dovarescu ashore at Havre in a launch, with his valet and chauffeur—thence proceeding up the Scotch coast with the supposed Desmoulins and being reported from there in the newspapers. A touring-car met Dovarescu at Havre with specially obtained passports from his embassy, and so he was in Paris—lodged in a quiet but luxurious eight-room apartment—without anyone but the Prefecture knowing of his presence. During the next fortnight, while Lady Nora and her accomplices were searching the hotel-registers for him, he succeeded in obtaining interviews of the utmost importance with seven of the more prominent French statesmen and coming to a tentative understanding with them, these interviews occurring at the houses of mutual friends where there was no suggestion of a political atmosphere. Then he took the early plane one morning from Le Bourget and flew over to Croydon. In this case, his arrival was reported in the news-sheets, merely as a young Serbian interested in linen-mills and sports of all kinds—but it was a clue which brought Lady Nora and her party to London a few hours later.

Presenting one of Earl Trevor's letters, Dovarescu was surprised to receive a very cordial invitation from the recipient to stop at his London house, with his two men, until the Earl could entertain him at his own mansion in Park Lane. At first inclined to refuse as courteously as he might, he nevertheless saw that it would be a much safer and more advantageous location for him than any of the London hotels—so finally accepted. And the next letter he presented seemed to pave the way for interviews which he had most doubted his luck in getting. In a week he had talked with several of the Cabinet men—exhibiting so keen a grasp of politics in eastern Europe and presenting the mutual advantages of a secret understanding with Jugo-Slavia with so much force as to win their respect even if they didn't agree with all his arguments.

Dovarescu was beginning to feel sure that his mission would be more or less of a success when one evening he received a sickening jolt.

AS he was naturally accepting many social invitations, it was a foregone conclusion that he would run across Lady Nora very shortly, inasmuch as her own position was presumably unassailable and her wit had made her quite popular. He

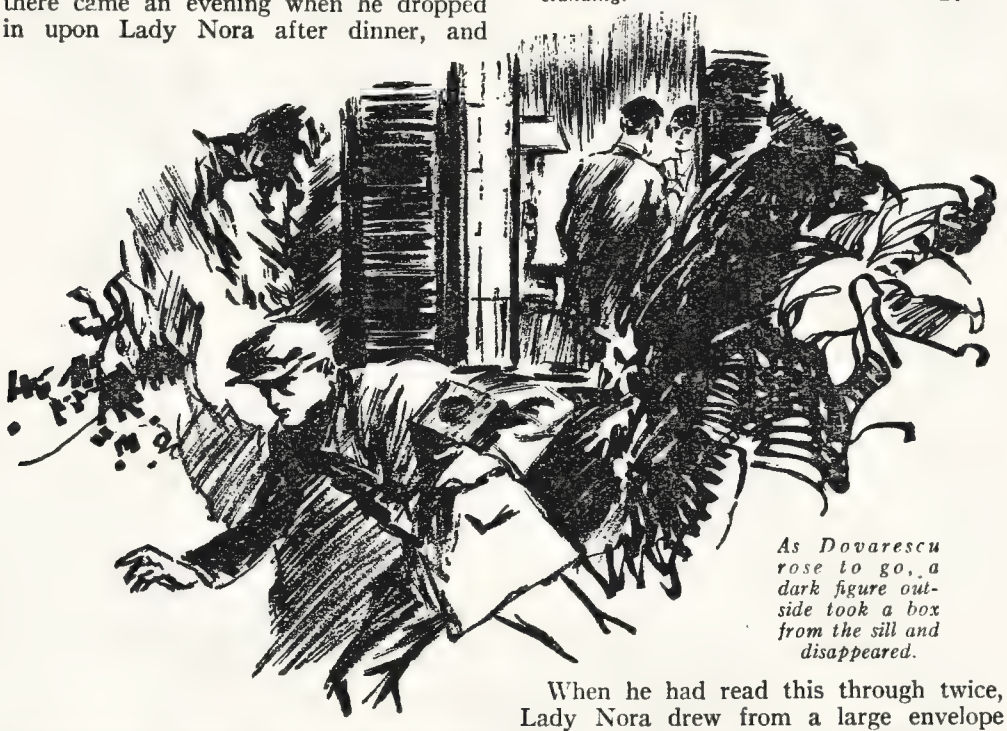
explained that he had been too busy securing business for his linen-mills to look her up before, but would call next day. As she made it a dinner engagement, he met half a dozen attractive people—and others during his next evening there. Sir Basil and Prosby he saw but once—the Honorable Harriet, they said, was stopping with friends in the north of England. Finally there came an evening when he dropped in upon Lady Nora after dinner, and found Prosby there—both receiving him with a very serious manner. Lady Nora said she had just had a most amazing communication from the Signora di Calaggio in Naples—in fact, she hardly had the courage to tell him what the woman was threatening to do.

Prosby then helped her out a bit by saying that the Signora had somehow gotten herself into the hands of the Camorra and had been terrorized into promising certain things in order to save herself from mutilation and her young son from death. Without the slightest knowledge on their part, she had managed to procure a certain document—undoubtedly forged—and some photographs which compromised Dovarescu so ruinously that it was simply out of the question to permit their being published. Lady Nora handed him first a photograph of a page of handwriting which he would have sworn was his own:

Excellency—

What I have to offer for reasonable compensation is this: A special envoy is now on his way from B——e to Paris and London charged with a mission to obtain certain guarantees against future eventualities. Appointments for interviews have been made for him in advance. He will see a number of French and British statesmen whose names will be given to you, with the results of those interviews, if we reach a satisfactory understanding.

—D.



As Dovarescu rose to go, a dark figure outside took a box from the sill and disappeared.

When he had read this through twice, Lady Nora drew from a large envelope with Italian stamps and the Naples postmark three eight-by-ten enlargements of what appeared to have been snap-shots obtained, seemingly, with the consent of the principal figure in them for reasons of political expediency. They showed Dovarescu sitting by a long table in an attitude suggesting that the impressive figure on the other side—while handing over to him four packages of bank-notes—had accompanied this action with some rather scorching remarks, and had permitted a photograph to be taken in order to make sure of holding the Serb absolutely in his power.

For a moment it seemed to Dovarescu that the circulation of blood in his body had stopped short. The more he looked at the written page and the photographs, the more he grasped the fact of how utterly damning they were to him as a diplomat and as a man. Then Lady Nora made it even clearer.

"The Signora, poor woman, knows what you must think of her, but she is helpless. She must obtain a large sum of money for those who are threatening her and carried out the details of all this, or else her beautiful boy will be brutally murdered and she herself horribly mutilated. Says that unless you can send her this sum she will be compelled by them to publish that note and the photographs in the London and Paris gazettes. If you pay her this sum, the negatives and the original of this note will be handed to you in exchange for it.

"Of course our first impulse was to advise your defying her to carry out any such threat, but upon reflection I don't see how we can do that—unless she has been entirely mistaken as to your object in coming here. If you are merely the wealthy sportsman you are supposed to be, any publication of these things can't do you any great harm, and you'll hardly feel obliged to pay any staggering sum to prevent what the Signora says she's threatened with—it's really none of your affair. On the other hand, if her guess as to your being really a special envoy is actually the truth— In that case such publication will undo in a second everything you may have accomplished in Paris and London.

"You simply can't permit anything like this to come out—no matter what it costs!"

DOVARESCU, by this time, had pulled himself together. His face was slightly pale, but that was the only indication of what was passing in his mind.

"Er—just what sum does the Signora mention in her letter?"

"Fifty thousand pounds. They demanded double that at first, but were finally convinced that even your Government might have difficulty in paying over such a sum in cash without drawing too much attention."

"Of course it would require full explanations to our ambassador and might take a week or so before we were able to finance it quietly."

"She says in her letter that three days after you receive these prints, others will be given by their agents to news-sheets in London and Paris. An agent will come to this house at any hour you set, with the negatives and original—to be handed over in exchange for the bank-notes."

"H-m-m—do you know, Lady Nora, there is something about those photographs which has a very fishy look. Do you suppose that any French or British statesman will believe that our Italian friend would permit himself to be photographed in such a situation, or that I myself would walk into any such trap as that?"

"The general impression will be that this picture, obviously, was taken with no premonition upon his part or yours—through a window, from the outside—by men who escaped before they were even distinctly seen. That the flood-light must have been standing unnoticed in some corner, and turned on by an accomplice among the house-servants. No matter how it was managed, that doesn't get away from the fact that certain most confidential diplomatic understandings are being blazoned forth to the public to draw goodness knows how much parliamentary censure upon the statesmen involved. Presumably this is your handwriting, which will be recognized by everyone familiar with it. This is unquestionably a photograph of you and the Italian statesman—there's no evidence whatever of any faking about it. If anyone believes the evidence of his eyes, you were both there under those conditions when that picture was taken. Looks rather bad for a special envoy, doesn't it? The whole point would appear to be this: will publication of these prints destroy everything you have accomplished here and seriously injure your country's prospects for some time to come—or wont it? It's your decision—not ours. We can only regret most painfully that we ever took you to the woman's house—but that doesn't help matters!"

"But—deuce take it all! How can anything of this sort do any great harm to a linen-manufacturer and yachtsman—who isn't of sufficient importance to do his country much harm one way or the other?"

"Well, I suppose that our British merchants would hesitate about placing orders with a man who got himself into the position these photos would indicate—pretty serious charge against the man's character, I'd say. Of course I don't know whether these statements in the forged note are true—but if they are, it exposes what will harm your country a lot to have exposed—at just this time. However, we'll gladly help in any way we can."

"I'll take these photos with me and think the matter over tonight. If you've no other engagement, I'll drop in tomorrow evening to let you know what I decide. If I pay the money, I could probably

have it by the next afternoon—that's the best I could do. And—er—let me make a suggestion. I'm making no admissions of any sort. But, conceivably, some men in an *impasse* of this sort would simply shoot themselves. You might wire the Signora to that effect. I think it would be short-sighted for any of you to hurry my decision too much!"

THERE was an open window at the end of the divan upon which Lady Nora was sitting—less than three feet from her—screened against mosquitoes and flies.

As Dovarescu, stern-faced, rose to go, a dark figure hidden by the shrubbery outside the window took a black box, with a large round opening in one side, from the sill—and disappeared around the corner of the house, where he was joined by another man. They got into a car a little farther up the street, then called to the Serb's chauffeur, as he passed:

"Slow up a minute, Serge! We want to speak with the master!"

In considerable surprise the man recognized the voice, and stopped. Dovarescu then saw the two Earls in the other car, and after some hesitation, accepted their invitation to join them for a conference. He didn't see how it was possible for them to do anything helpful in his case, but they were two of the most influential men in the country. He asked their destination.

"House of the Home Secretary—we happen to know he's there. Cheer up, old chap—you're not in as bad a hole as you fancy!"

When the Cabinet man received them in his study, Earl Trevor asked the Serb to show him the photograph and the facsimile of the note—which he reluctantly did—drawing a low whistle from the Secretary's lips as he examined the things.

"I say! It's inconceivable that you were really there when this was taken, sir—but they're dev'lish convincing!"

Trevor laughed.

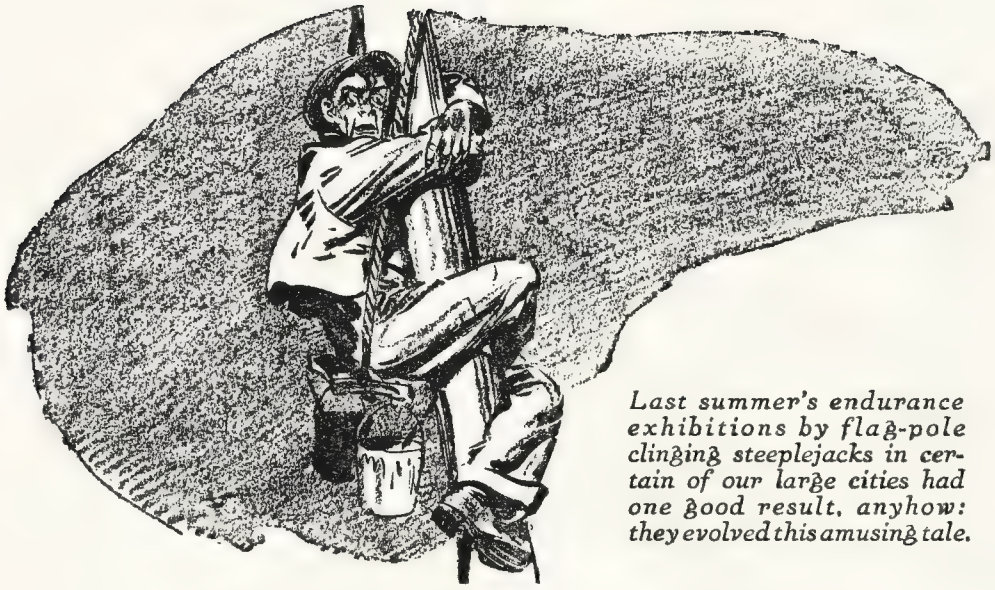
"He actually *was* there, d'ye see—but he didn't know it! Totally unconscious from a hypo-shot I'd jabbed into his thigh. I saw those pictures taken from the dark hall outside—whole thing was a frame-up. Lammerford an' I got a reel of cinema-film while the scoundrels were doing this—here are a few 'still'-enlargements from it. Look at 'em!" (The "stills" showed all of the blackmailers including Sir Basil, who was impersonating the Italian and wiped off some of his make-up while Trevor was still cranking.) "Now listen to this dictagraph—the talk he's just had with Lady Nora an' Prosby. An' glance at this affidavit of Martyn Byrne's, at Gibraltar! Shows up the whole outfit—doesn't it?"

The Secretary put on his glasses and went over the exhibits with a strong magnifying lens. Then he sat for two or three minutes in deep thought.

"These negatives and the original of the note are here in London, Trevor. I'd say that all the talk about Camorrist agents having 'em is pure nons'nse. This woman who calls herself Lady Nora is the brains of the organization—she'll have everything in the way of docum'nts and negatives in her own house. The Signora, in Naples, is doubtless an underling without the brains or nerve to act upon her own initiative. Do you know—I fancy you've smashed at one shot the cleverest, most dangerous gang of blackmailers London ever has seen. We've had a lot of indications during the past two years, but no direct evidence like this. It's a case for Scotland Yard rather than my departm'nt—but the chief inspector will never believe you unless I come along myself."

IT took a deal of reiterated explanation, with the exhibits, to make the chief inspector grasp all sides of the case and the imperative necessity for keeping all details out of the newspapers—just as the Home Secretary had anticipated. Presently, however, a file of constables was sent to Lady Nora's house—who arrested her and thoroughly searched the place, while others of the force descended upon Sir Basil, Prosby and the Honorable Harriet, all of whom were found in their usual London quarters. All four of them demanded a public trial upon the ground that there wasn't a shred of evidence against them, but Earl Trevor's cinema-reel, the dictagraph-record and Byrne's affidavit were sufficient to procure a private hearing before two of the Lords Justices and send all of them away for long prison terms.

Events of the next two or three years will indicate how successful Dovarescu's mission really was. But the one thing beyond all speculation in the affair is the sort of entertainment awaiting the two Earls in Belgrade the next time they happen that way—including a conferring of Serbian decorations of the highest grade—for reasons not explained in detail.



Last summer's endurance exhibitions by flag-pole clinging steeplejacks in certain of our large cities had one good result, anyhow: they evolved this amusing tale.

Sitting Bill

By JOHN PEERE MILES

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

POLE-SITTERS are crazy, you say. Maybe you're right and maybe again you're not—there are some that think Lindbergh was lucky. If you want my honest opinion on the subject, I'd say they were plain, harmless fools and I guess that sounds strange coming from a man who won a wife and a fortune at the business.

I started in the game by accident, and therefore wasn't exactly accountable. However, now that I've made my pile and am retired from the game, I can't help recalling how hard it was for the boys in the old days, when pole-sitting was an adventure done on the spur of the moment, without weeks of training and ballyhooing. Times have changed; the new crop no longer does it for sport and glory. They have to have telephones, à la carte service and personal liveried servants in attendance day and night. It was different when I started.

Before I became William J. Murphy, the first champion pole-sitter to startle the world, I was Bill, just an ordinary house-painter in Patrick Casey's emporium of oils and pigments, and my salary depended on the amount of work we did—we had very little to do.

One day a call came in from the manager of April Brothers Department Store, and he asked Casey did he have a man with nerve enough to paint the flagpole on the roof of the eighteen-story April Building.

"Nerve!" says Casey. "If it's a man with nerve you want, I've got one here who'd take a chance selling harness in Detroit."

He called me when the conversation was over. "Bill," says he, "brace up like a miracle man and look like you're all breaking out with a rash of bravery—I've got a job for you and me."

"You don't have to tell me a thing about it," says I, "I've heard all I want to, so you needn't go any further. I'm quitting."

"What did you say?" he asks.

"That I'm quitting," I shouts. "In other words, I'm through! You can't get me prettying flagpoles for union wages and glory. The war is over and I'm a patriot only after working hours."

"Aw, have a heart!" pleads Casey. "This is the first paint job that has come my way since I got Mrs. Casey, and if we don't get some cash in this business pretty soon,

my name's going to be a minus zero number in the county poor-farm."

"That's hard luck, indeed," says I with sarcasm. "Just whose bad break is that?"

"Yours," answers Casey. "If I go broke, you'll be leaner than a boarding-house hot-cake. What I'd like to see you do is to show me some nerve. Painting poles is an easy job!"

"Sure," says I, "and why doesn't Mr. Casey take the easy job, seeing as it's him that gets the credit and the big dough? What's the idea of picking on me?"

"There are three reasons why I can't do it," remarks Casey, "and it just happens that three of them is two too many. First: I've got a wife who's paying up my back insurance. It looks phony and I aint giving anyone any encouragement, if you know what I mean. Second: I'm a master painter, and a master painter aint supposed to paint ordinary flagpoles—it would look funny. Third: I've got a weak heart, and the altitude wont do it any good. There!"

"So!" I says. "I have also got three reasons, and all three of them are good. First: I'm a single man and haven't anyone to leave my insurance to. Second: I don't want to do it; and third, I've quit!"

"Be reasonable, Bill," he whines. "Didn't you hear me telling them I had a specially brave painter for their job? I meant you. You can't run out on me after that, you know."

"I don't care," says I, "William J. Murphy would rather be a coward with his feet on the ground, than a hero with his feet in the breeze."

"Suppose I should offer you double time?" hints Casey.

"Supposing you did that," I says, "I'd say it was a different story. Make the offer; show me the pole—I'll do the rest."

NOW, don't get me wrong. I'm not afraid to sell the zoo idea to Bengal tigers—if there is dough in it. My little side spiel with Casey was just to get more money out of him.

I got the stuff in shape and piled into Casey's combination paint-mixer and pleasure-wagon, and soon I'm at the April Department Store, where I find Manager Collins, in women's underwear—that's the name of the department I found him in, I mean.

"I'm the painter," says I. "Where's the pole?"

He gave me a queer look and followed me to the freight-elevator, and on the way up he explained what he wanted done.

"But I hope Mr. Casey wasn't wrong about you," he says. "I certainly do hope he isn't given to exaggeration."

"What's he been saying about me?" I asks.

"He said you have a lot of nerve," and he gave me the stary eye again. "I sincerely hope he's right, because nerve is what you're going to need."

"Say," I says, "what's funny about this job? Has the pole got splinters?"

"Worse than that," says Collins solemnly and without moving his eyes from me. "The pole is what you might call a man-killer—that is, not exactly always, because the last man to go up it got only a broken back."

"So," I says, catching on. "Only a broken back! What happened to the others?"

"It's a sad and long story," says Collins. "We used to give our trade to Swenson on Ninth Street, and a fine set of boys he had too, God rest their souls! For three years we called Swenson when we wanted to have the pole spruced up. The first time he sent us a nice young fellow who knew his business, and he started up the pole whistling a merry tune—"

"Yes," says I, "go on."

"It was sad," continues Collins, "the way he looked when we picked him up. We buried him at our own expense. Wasn't that nice of us?"

"Sure was," I says. "Certainly was decent of you."

"But the next man's widow tried to sue us," says Collins, looking sad. "So we let her bury him herself."

"And the third," I asks, "was he the one with the broken back?"

"No, you're getting ahead of me, Mr. Murphy," says he. "That was the fifth one. He made all the trouble! You see, we would have given Swenson the job again this time, but we couldn't reach him. I understand the man with the broken back got nasty about it and sued Swenson for fifty thousand dollars—and collected."

"Gee!" I says. "That must have put him out of business."

"Yes, it did," says the manager. "I found that out when I tried to get him again. However, a little thing like that doesn't bother me, so I called up all the painters in town; and would you believe it,

Casey was the only one who would listen to me—he's a pretty live man, isn't he?"

"He sure is," says I. "He's got me working for him."

WE walked over the tar and crushed-stone roof to where the pole stood near the street side of the building. It looked like a hundred and fifty feet high and pretty good as poles go, only I couldn't swear to that, seeing as I'd never climbed one before in my life. I mixed up the color and got the rig in shape with the help of Collins. I sort of got cold feet when I was ready to go, not that I was exactly afraid, mind you, but it suddenly came to me what good was my double time going to do me with my spine doing an exit out of my mouth?

"What did you say was wrong with this pole?" I asks, sparring for time.

"I was just going to tell you," says Collins. "It bends."

"It bends," I repeats. "So that's it, is it?"

"Yes," says he, "that's the only thing wrong with it. Otherwise it's all right."

"In the middle?" I asks.

"Just couldn't say it does," Collins answers. "The testimony has been rather scarce."

I tried to dump the paint accidentally on the theory that without paint there wasn't any need for me to go to work, but Collins spoiled the stunt by picking the can out of the air as it was falling. I fingered the ropes for some time, waiting for my Irish spunk to work up, when the manager gives the rope a yank, and before I know what's going on, I was five feet in the air.

"Say," I groans, "is this your funeral or mine?"

"Beg your pardon," he says, "but I thought I'd give you a lift."

I pulled on the rope, hand over hand, and soon I was about ten feet up, but climbing came hard because I had to keep my eyes on this Collins guy, whose itching palms craved exercise. He let me make my own altitude when I said something sharp. I went up an inch or two at a time, and when about ten minutes passed, I learned the answer to my riddle.

The bend was in the middle!

This, I thought to myself, is a tough spot for William J. Murphy to be in. I figured it out that I'd gone that high already and a couple more inches wouldn't matter anyway if I fell, so I took more altitude, but the higher I got the farther I was from the pole. Funny? I'll say it was. Try climbing a fishing-rod!

I took my first look down and gulped hard when I thought of the splash I'd make on that roof. It worried me, and I guess it did Collins too, because I could hear him say "Damn it!" several times.

"Be yourself," I shouts down. "I'm all right, even if I am up in the air and my color's white." Get the wise crack?

"Don't be silly," says Collins. "I wasn't thinking of you at all. I'm a plain damn' fool, that's what I am."

"What's the matter?" I says. "Why be singular?"

"What's the matter?" he mocks, laughing funny-like. "I forgot to ask you for a match."

"Cheer up!" I says. "There's still hope." And I reached with one hand for the matches in my left hip pocket, but I didn't get them. Just then I lost altitude and saved myself from a tail-spin and a forced landing by a quick recovery.

"A nice warm place for you!" I says.

All this time the pole was bent like an English butler at the Zandergilt ball, with me a-dangling from the nervous top by a rope and pulley, and I had no more speaking acquaintance with the stick itself than a cow-puncher has for a sheep-herder. How am I going to paint this thing, says I to myself, when I can't even touch it? It comes to me then that the answer—like the price of case goods—is higher and higher. The bend carried me near the edge of the roof, and I could look into the street eighteen stories down, where hundreds of people that looked like ants were dodging the traffic and stopping at the edge of a great black spot that I took to be a crowd.

A FELLOW does a lot of thinking when he's looking down on something, and my thoughts weren't helping me paint the pole, so I shut my eyes and lifted—and lifted; then I opened them slowly, and all I could see was blue sky. It frightened me for a second. I twisted my head and saw that I'd been turned around, and that the pole was in back of me and still out of reach. But I was a couple of inches nearer, and with a few more heaves I was as high as I could get. By swinging the rig I got near enough to the stick to twist my legs around it, and then I knotted the lines over the pulley so that I could be free to work at my trade.

After I had done that, I let go of the ropes. The knot slipped, and I dropped five feet and came to with a jerk as it caught again. It was a narrow shave.

"Say," shouts the manager person. "What are you doing, and when are you going to get to work?"

"Mister," I yells, taking a fresh body scissors on the pole, "I never work while strangers are around. This funny business you see me doing is me testing the pole."

"All right!" he says. "Guess I'll go."

I was all alone up there, hanging on for dear life, when the elevator door slammed on Collins. "Bill," I says to myself, "you haven't anyone to blame but yourself for the mess you're in. If you hadn't been so greedy for double time, nothing would have happened."

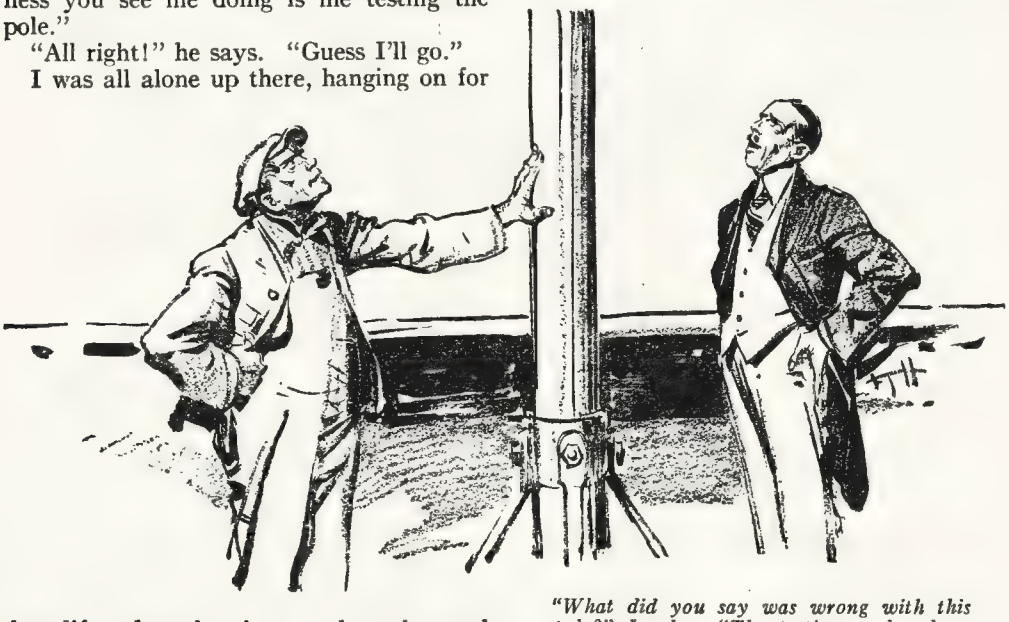
I shifted my position a bit; and then a cramp hit one of my legs and straightened it out, and before I could do anything about it I lost my scissors grip on the pole, and I went swinging out over the edge of the roof. . . . .

I must have fainted, because I didn't have the slightest idea of what was going on until I came to with a jerk. My brain said I was dead and my body seemed numb, and so I kept my eyes closed for a long time until I had argued the thing over. When I got nerve enough to open my eyes, I could see that I had dropped three feet more when my slip from the pole had loosened the pulley again; but worse than that, I was hanging from the stick like a spider from a limb.

What could I do? There I was, as lonesome as a rattlesnake in an old ladies' home. I yelled for somebody to throw me a rope or a parachute. I didn't care. But all the sympathy and help I got was the low moaning of the breeze and the chattering of my nervous teeth.

"Stupid!" says I to myself, "Use your head, man, and heave some of your useless paint in the street."

Well, I did that thing, thinking it would get a rise out of some one who would call a cop, who would wake up the janitor, who would come on the roof to find out what it was all about. The cop would want to arrest me, and to do that he'd have to get me down. It looked simple. I dropped the paint and waited an hour. Then I threw the can where I thought it couldn't miss—nothing happened. . . . .



"What did you say was wrong with this pole?" I asks. "The testimony has been rather scarce," Collins answers.

Then came the dawn, as the picture titles go, and I could see the street lights go out, and a little bit later I made out the roof below me, and I didn't have to do any guess-work to figure out that if I fell, I was going to pass the edge of the roof by like a money promise, eighteen stories down. I tried swinging the rig gently, hoping I could get near enough to the stick again to work another body scissors on it, but while it got me nearer to the pole by inches, it also carried me farther out over the street. I let the stunt alone.

I'm dangling from the pole as limp as a dead mackerel, when who should pop up on the roof but a sawed-off runt who was smiling.

"That's a great gag!" says he. "It's the best thing we've had happen in years. I couldn't have done it better myself!"

"Who," says I, "are you?"

"I," says the half-pint, "am Peter Cadwallader Smith, purveyor of painless publicity, disseminator of glad tidings and sometimes—when the occasion demands—a competent suppress agent."

"So!" I says.

"Yes," laughs this hyena. "I was strolling down the street this morning trying to get inspiration, when what do I see? Give up, don't you? All right! The thing I see is a crowd in front of April's department store."

"Say, young man," I hollers down to him, "I don't happen to be interested in what you saw—cut the gab and let me down!"

"But you don't understand, Mr.—er—"

"William J. Murphy," I tells him, "of the Weehawken Murphys, projector of painful paint-pots—and my aim is good."

The runt backed up.

"But you don't understand, Mr. Murphy," he says, "and frankly I don't care whether you do or not. But to continue with my story:

"Ah, I said when I saw the crowd. This is Peter Cadwallader Smith's chance to earn his salary from old man April. So I hurried and found that everybody was rubbernecking with their eyes on a burly bozo who was hanging over the roof from the flag-pole. If that simp all alone and without advance ballyhoo can draw two thousand people that are in a hurry to get to work what can he do with my help?

"So I fights my way through the mob, wakes up the freight elevator man and here I am, Peter Cadwallader Smith—at your service."

"I don't care who you are and what you think," I says, "but how you're going to let me down interests me a lot, and when you're going to do it just thrills me to death."

"I'd like to bring you to earth, Murphy," says Smith, "but you see, it's this way: old man April is sore on me, and he says that if I don't get his store written up on the front pages, it's me for the back door. So I says, all right, I'll get the store in print if I have to kill some one."

"Say," says I, "what you planning? Am I the carcass?"

"Oh, no," he answers. "If you were to spill on this roof, the show would be over and the crowd out on the streets would go home. Now with you on the pole the crowd stays—get me? As long as you're up there, you're a hero, I hold my job, and April gets a few customers who are so bleary-eyed rubbernecking at you they'll buy anything."

"You've got a brilliant idea," I says, "and you may be a good press-agent, but there's something going wrong."

"Well," says he, "what's that?"

"Me," I shouts. "Just me. What it takes to break up your scheme I'm all broke out with. I'm not going to stand for any of this fool business, and I don't care what happens to April and Peter Cadwallader Smith: I'm coming down."

"How," sneers Smith, "are you going to do it?"

There wasn't anything in the books I could say to that one. It looked as if I'd have to stay up there until the ropes rotted, but I didn't let on I knew it.

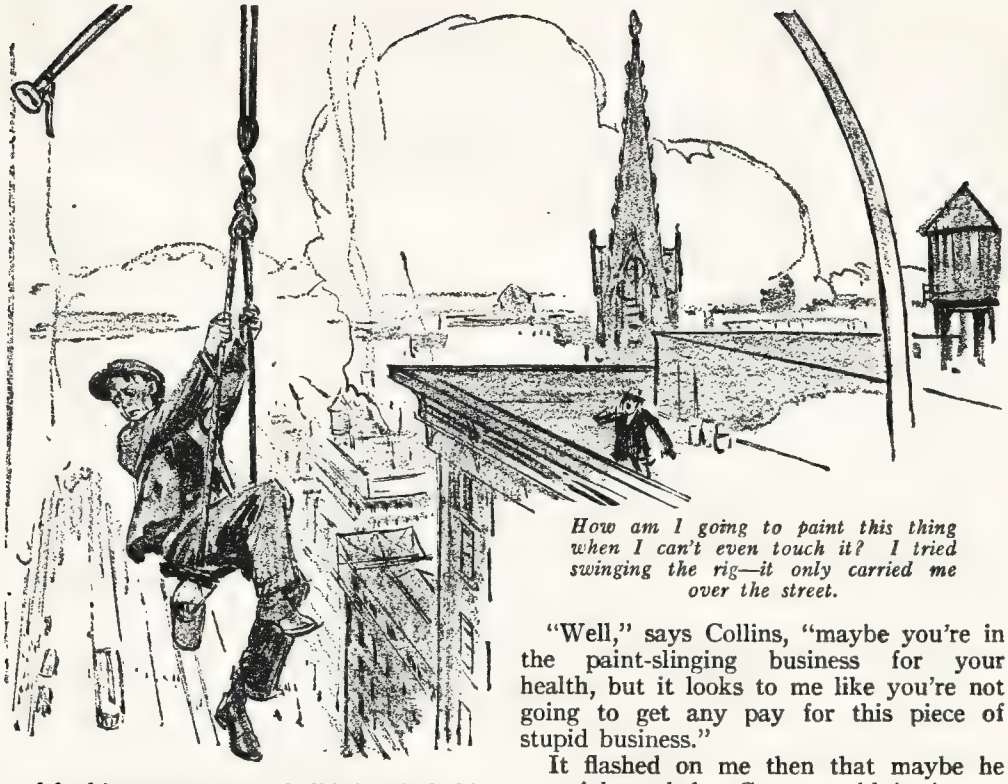
"Oh," says I, "let me do the worrying about that."

"You're in bad humor," says Smith, "I'll leave you to think things over. Tra-la!"

He turned his back on me and walked away, but before he got to the freight elevator he waved at me and smiled.

"Oh, Murphy," he yells, "remember! If you come down ahead of time, you're a corpse. Take my advice, though, and you'll be a hero."

IT was a tough spot for me, seeing I was in the humor to break the runt's neck, but all I could do was to take the guff with a grin. I twisted the ropes holding the rig and turned my back to him. By bending over a little, I could make out the crowds in the street, blocking the traffic and all looking up at me. I guessed that there were three thousand boobs down there, and it came to me then that there was something in this glory business, and that besides being a bozo to myself, I was a sort of hero to the mob. I swelled up and waved my hand just to see what would happen, and hundreds of handkerchiefs waved back at me, and I'll bet most of them were from girls. Pretty soon I saw people coming up to the roofs of other buildings and bringing chairs with them



How am I going to paint this thing when I can't even touch it? I tried swinging the rig—it only carried me over the street.

and looking up at me. I didn't mind this at first, but after a while they got on my nerves and I craved privacy.

It was nearly noon when the elevator door opened and Smith and Collins came out, both grinning.

"Good morning, Murphy," says Collins, "How are you making out with the painting?"

"Not so good," I admitted. "Fact is, I haven't started yet."

"That's too bad," he smiles up at me. "And after all the trouble you've been to. It's too bad. I really don't know what to do about it."

"Mister," I says, "there is only one thing for you to do, and that is to let me down. I've got two confessions to make: I haven't got any paint left for to paint the pole with, and I haven't got the nerve; I want to go home."

"Hah," says Collins. "So that is it, is it? I'll see what's to be done about it."

He chinned with Smith, and I could see both were grinning.

"I'm sorry," says he, "but our agreement with Casey was that the pole was to be painted by evening of last night, and you admit it isn't painted, don't you?"

"I do," says I. "It's as paintless as a boarding-school mistress, and what's more, I'm through."

"Well," says Collins, "maybe you're in the paint-slinging business for your health, but it looks to me like you're not going to get any pay for this piece of stupid business."

It flashed on me then that maybe he was right and that Casey wouldn't give me any overtime like he promised he would when I took the job.

"You can't pull anything like that on me," I yells. "I'll get my money out of this job if I have to go to jail for it."

"Fine spirit," says Collins. "That's the stuff that heroes are made of. Now, we don't intend paying you a cent for painting the pole, which you haven't done, and we can't get you down without burning up the fire department. There's only one thing to do!"

"And that," I asks, "is what?"

"The only thing we can do," says he, paying no attention to me, "is for us to leave you up there and give you a chance to prove you're not so dumb as you look. The proposition is this: Five thousand people downstairs have got the foolish notion that you're a brave man; five thousand persons have got to look into our store windows to look up to see you. Figuring it conservatively, if only ten per cent of five thousand come into our store, twenty-five per cent of them—which is one hundred and twenty-five—will buy something. If the average sale is one dollar and eighty-nine cents a person, that will make our sales for the day $236.65 more than we made last week. Do you follow?"

"I want to come down," I moans.

"We can only attribute this phenomenal attention and sales to you," says he, ignoring me, "and it must continue! You've got to stay up that pole!"

"Mr. Collins," says I with all the dignity I can get up, "it hurts me to say this to you, but you can go to the place where moth-balls melt in the summer-time. I'm coming down."

"Don't be ridiculous," he sneers, "be yourself. Remember the five that've gone before you. Listen to me, and you'll eat caviar the rest of your life; the papers will call you a hero, and the dames will want autographed pictures of you—and maybe there'll be some money in the bank."

"That interests me," says I. "Spill the works—what's the overtime?"

"MURPHY," says Collins, serious, "we want you to stay up that pole for a couple of days because the store needs the publicity. We'll pay you regular painter's overtime and twenty bucks a day bonus beside."

"And the grub," says I, "is that thrown up?"

"Yes," he says, "we'll manage to get you some grub. Is it a go?"

"I'm considering your generous offer," I answers, "and I am prompted to help your business, but there is something that prevents me from accepting. I'm sorry."

"Oh, we can fix that," says he, "what is it, Murphy?"

"It's my girl," I informs him, and I just couldn't help blushing. "I got a date tonight to slip a solitaire on her eager finger."

"So!" says Collins, "that's great! What do you think of that, Smith?"

"Great story," says the runt. "It's a knock-out! Can you imagine reading this in the papers: 'Pole Hero to Ring Belle after Record Breaking Feat,' or this one: 'Beauty Sighs for Pole Sitter's Safe Return.' It's a wow!"

"Nix on the paper stuff," says I. "Minnie doesn't like it."

"We've got to fix it up some way," says Collins. "Suppose you write a note and we'll take it to her and bring an answer back to you."

"What'll I use for paper?" says I, sarcastic-like, "and what'll I use for a pencil?"

"Hadn't thought of that," says Collins, "but we'll fix that too."

HE sent Smith down the elevator, and pretty soon the runt came back with paper and pencil and a coil of rope. He gave me some indication of what he was trying to do with the rope when he spent ten minutes' time and a lot of language trying to throw one end of it up where I was. Finally he saw it was impossible, the reason being that the rope was too short, so I threw him my tie, and with his own and Collins', he got enough length to reach me.

It was a simple matter then for me to grab the rope as it came skimming through the air and make one end of it tight to the rig. The runt then tied some writing paper and a pencil to the last ties, and I hoisted it up. It was tough business trying to write, but finally I got the job done. Now if you're the kind of a person that likes to read other people's personal mail, here is how it read:

Dear Babe:

Remember about the date we had tonight? Gee, Babe, I'd sure be happy to see you again, but guess we'll have to call off the date, much as I hate to do it. The reason is I'm working late. The runt who brings you this note is harmless, babe, so don't sock him for my sake. He'll explain things. *Love.*

Bill.

P. S. I'm getting overtime, so it's all right.

I folded the note and sent it down to Smith with a kiss.

"Take it to her," I says, "and wait for an answer—on paper."

SMITH left; Collins followed him and returned in half an hour with some sandwiches and coffee in a bottle, and what I didn't do to the refreshments is a shame. The food made a new man out of me, and I could even smile at this foolish business I had got myself into. By that time my legs were numb, so I stood up on the rig and shook the creaks out of them. The crowd in the streets must have thought I was doing stunts, for it looked like they were going crazy waving handkerchiefs and hats in the air. Just for fun I kicked both feet out in the air and it got them wild. I was going to do a handspring, when Collins yells up at me.

"Say," he says, "what's the big idea, trying to break your neck?"

"What," I says, "is it to you?"

"There's two reasons," he says. "In the first place if you break your neck, our sales will flop and everybody will think we were putting something over—and be-

sides, you don't get any money. In the second place, we've insured your life."

"That's nice," I says. "What's the reward to me?"

"Don't be silly," Collins chides. "This is only one-way insurance—payable to us when you come down in a splash."

"Who," I growls, "is 'us'?"

"It's this way," he explains without a smile. "Smith and myself thought it would be a shame for no one to benefit if you killed yourself, so we spoke to an insurance pal we'd done business with before."

"How many times before?" I says, getting an idea.

"Oh, about five times," he says, "but that doesn't matter, does it?"

"No," I says, "I just wanted to know."

"All right, then. You see we got this insurance on a graduated scale. If you fall now, all we get is fifty dollars—which isn't worth all the trouble we've been to, is it, now?"

"No!" I shouts. "No!"

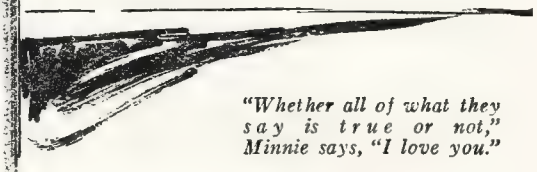
"But if you hold off for another day and fall," he continues, "we get fifty dollars more—fifty dollars for each day. Now you see why we don't want you to fall for a while?"

That was their game, and I had been dumb enough not to see it before. There this guy was, cool as a cucumber in cold storage, telling me all about his little deal as if it didn't mean any more to him than my favorite breakfast-food.

"However," he sighs, speaking once more, "you may have noticed that we're terribly anxious you don't fall at all."

"I'm interested," I says. "Why?"

"The boss doesn't know about our insurance deal," he explains, "and he's told us that he would fire us if you fell before the spring goods are all cleared out. It's



"Whether all of what they say is true or not," Minnie says, "I love you."

a pretty pickle for Smith and myself to be in after all the work we've done. Now we stand a chance to get nothing at all. It's tough!"

For a couple of minutes I was as dumb as the faculty in a deaf-mute college, then I let out a string of Irish compliments that would make a mule-skinner blush.

"Insults wont help the situation," says Collins. . . . "Ah, here comes Smith."

The runt came up and tied a piece of paper on the line of communication and with nervous fingers I opened Babe's reply. This is what she wrote:

Your note received and contents noted. Appreciate your position. Sorry you can't be over tonight, but it's just as well, as I'm entertaining your friend Mr. Smith, instead. Ta-ta, old dear.

Minnie.

The world looked sick to me, just then, but I didn't let on that Minnie's note had raised my temperature.

"Really, Murphy," Smith apologizes, "I can't say how it happened. She—"

"It's all right," I says.

I wrote another note to Minnie in which I complimented her on the new boy friend, and I'll admit I rubbed it in good and plenty, but there was some cause for me to get sore, and I didn't feel mean about passing it along. The runt at first refused to deliver the note, but I threatened to jump and spoil his plans. Finally he gave in and he and Collins left me up in the air wondering what there was to do next.

That matter was taken out of my hands ten minutes after the door shut behind them. I was looking down at the

crowds at the time when the elevator door opened and five wild-looking men made a rush for the pole.

"Don't talk to these other slobs," says one of them, with a pad and pencil in his hands. "I'm from the Evening *Clarion*, and you know the *Clarion* has the largest circulation in town."

"Don't believe him," shouts another. "The Morning *Blat* has the largest circulation, and I can prove it."

While I'm taking this in, the *Clarion* and *Blat* boys are giving a fair imitation of two preliminary battlers at a second-rate club. The other three, taking advantage of their opportunity, draw closer.

"I'm from the *Tatler*," says one of them, "and I want to get your story exclusively for my paper. The *Tatler* has the largest circulation among intelligent people."

"Oh, what a lie," butts in another. "Do you mean to stand there and say that more educated people read the *Tatler* than the Morning *Register? Do* you?"

The *Tatler* said it with a right uppercut to the jaw, and pretty soon both papers were as tangled as a fancy pretzel.

"Hey, you," I shouts down to the only one left, "I suppose you have the largest circulation in town?"

Did he say yes? He did not.

"I must be honest with you," he lisps, "I really must! I can't say that we do, and I'm not allowed to say that we don't. The *Moon* believes in telling the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help us God!"

He looked up eagerly, and his smile was so innocent and trusting that I figured I could get the best kind of a break out of him. "You get the story, kid," I says, "because you look so honest and will give me a fine story."

"Thanks," says the reporter. "I appreciate that very much. It pays to be honest, doesn't it? Well, then, I have already written the story."

"You've what?" I asks.

"The story is being put into type," he continues, "but we're holding it up."

"Oh," I says, "so you're holding it up."

"Yes," he lisps, "we do this out of courtesy to you and in the interests of truth."

It was very nice of him to do that, and I appreciated it a whole lot, and I asked him if he'd got the thing all ready in type, why does he waste time chinning with me.

"It's this way, Mr. Murphy," he says: "we don't like to run these human interest stories about prominent people and heroes without first getting their signatures and O. K. to do it. It's the *Moon's* policy to please."

"My signature! What for?" I asked.

"So that we can run it over the story," he replies. "We want to make it appear as if you were the author; in other words, you supply the name and fame, and I furnish the words—that's fair, isn't it?"

"Looks all right to me," I says, "but I don't like to sign things I haven't seen."

"Mr. Murphy," says the *Moon's* representative, "you have nothing to fear. I share your apprehensions about affixing the honorable Murphy name to a story you haven't seen, but in this case you are perfectly safe, for the story is just as you would have dictated it to me—an honest, unboastful account of an heroic deed—a saga of sacrifice atop the perilous poles of romance by the great hero of that story."

"That sounds pretty good," I says, "the way you put it. Send up some paper, and I'll give you my signature."

THE paper came up, and I'm about to write the honorable name when the four reporters stop their battling and bombard me with a lot of words out of which I gathered that I shouldn't sign anything. "What's this I hear?" I asks, and one of the reporters brushed my honest friend aside.

"Don't sign," he says. "I'll give you a hundred dollars for your signature."

"There's too much static up here," I says, "and I don't think I heard right. Did you say a hundred dollars?"

He indicated that my hearing was right, and I took a new hold on the rig. If he was willing to give me a hundred dollars for a signature, what would the other birds offer? So I thought it over for a few minutes, and I could see the *Moon* reporter getting nervous, and the other boys waiting for me to say something.

"I've decided," I says, "that my signature is worth dough, and since you boys are all with the papers, I'm willing to let it go at press rates. I'm offered a hundred dollars."

The boys got excited, and I could see all of them drawing apart and figuring the thing out in their minds. The *Clarion* man said he'd give me three hundred dollars for the series, and the *Register* boosted him fifty; then there was another twenty-five raise. While all this was going on the man

on the *Moon* looked so down in the mouth that I felt pity for him and offered him the series for four hundred flat.

He brightened up at that. "Done," he says. "Now send these other bozos home while we talk this matter over."

WHEN we're alone he asked me did I have a wife and children.

I told him all about Minnie and how I wanted to slip a ring on her finger.

"That'll do as well," he says. "We'll change your story slightly to fit the new facts. As it now stands you have a wife and three kids; but don't worry, I'll take care of this thing personally. Good-by."

I waved good-by weakly, and a funny feeling told me that something was going to spoil, but I didn't worry for long because there were other things I could think of. Early in the evening Smith came back, and he had a large bundle of papers under his arm.

"Murphy," he says, "didn't I tell you I was going to make a hero out of you? Read these papers!"

He hoisted them up to me and I picked out the *Moon* for a starter. This is the article:

POLE HERO'S OWN STORY OF GREAT ENDURANCE FLIGHT

(EDITOR'S NOTE—In his own words William J. Murphy tells exclusively to *Moon* readers how "us," meaning the flag-pole and himself, are enduring great hardships for the sake of a wife and three babies who are even now praying for his safe return to them. Now go on with the story.)

They said that we couldn't do it, that it was too much for a mere man of blood and sinews. But those fools who said no, what do they know of the power of love? I thought of my poor hungry babes crying lustily from their cribs for a spoonful of oatmeal—only a spoonful—and of my patient, enduring wife who had stood by my side through thick and thin. There was no holding back. We can do it, I cried; we shall do it. . . . .

How I got so far into that lying story without blowing up is still a mystery to me. I tried to splutter something, but my tongue was paralyzed, and all that came out was a gurgling noise that sounded like a one-way ticket to the crazy house.

"What's the matter, Murphy?" Smith asks. "Isn't everything all right?"

"You pup-faced idiot," I yells, and there was plenty of speed and direction in the words. "Did you read the article in the *Moon?*"

"I did," he smiles, "and I think it is wonderful, the way they mentioned April's Department Store, only I'm sorry for the trick you've played on Minnie. She trusted you until the very end, Murphy."

"It's all a lie," I says. "I haven't a wife and kids, and I never said that I had!"

"Nevertheless it's too bad," says Smith, shaking his head sadly. "It's a shame. I waited to deliver your note until the latest afternoon papers were out, figuring that I could restore you in Minnie's favor with the accounts of your bravery, and without realizing what it was all about, I showed her the *Moon* article. Well, sir, I never saw a dame break up so in my life. She cried for an hour, and the way she rested her beautiful, tear-swept face on my shoulder was pathetic. I tried to comfort her by saying you weren't quite as bad as your story made you out to be, and I said that the chances were you never had children or a wife and that the story was untrue.

"Then to help things along, I admitted that I had tipped off the *Moon's* reporter that I thought you were married, the theory being that the average working man had a wife and three kids to support, but I never supposed, I said, that he would print anything without first talking to you about this delicate matter. But Minnie couldn't believe me. She couldn't even read your second note for the tears that dimmed her pretty blue eyes, and her hands trembled so as they lay in mine.

"Believe it or not, Murphy, but I cried with her."

I GUESS I'd been pretty dumb during the whole business, but I was beginning to see things clearly enough while Smith was throwing his spiel. At first he had hoped to put himself in strong with his boss; then he figured on making some insurance money and stealing my Minnie after getting these lies printed in the papers about me. Well, it dawned on me that if Minnie was the kind of a dame that would throw me over for a pint-sized egg like Smith, I'd better be through with her.

"You don't have to cry about this thing," I says, "because there don't seem to be anything that you can lose except a little time, and I'm sorry that Minnie's been bawling all over your shoulders over me. Run back and tell her that I'm a busy business man with no spare time from his thoughts of finance, and don't forget that I'm not pining away for your return —I wish to be alone."

Sitting Bill

THE upshot of all this strange business was that I stuck it out for eighteen days and boosted the twenty-dollar-a-day bonus from old man April to a hundred bucks a day because I threatened to jump and spoil his business. I worked the *Moon* for a thousand more when I hinted I was going to sue them for libel, and all the time my overtime was piling up like the latest telephone number. I was getting rich O. K.'ing cigarettes, bath soap, liver pills and other ads, but there was one thing I wanted most of all—that was my Minnie.

I tried to forget her, but every time I opened a fan letter from the goofy dames that go in for such things, the picture of Minnie would come to my mind, and I got sick thinking of how I was going to spend my money all alone in my old age.

On the eighteenth day April's goods were all sold out and I got a polite hint through Collins that from then on I was working for nothing. We arranged to have the local fire-department take me down with much ceremony and ballyhoo, so that the morning papers could carry pictures, and while I was waiting for that to happen, the elevator door opened and a girl stepped out on the roof, and she was all muffled up in a heavy overcoat. At first I paid no attention, thinking it was another one of the hundred dames that wrote in their letters what good wives they'd make; but she walked straight to the edge of the roof under me, and my heart pounded—it was Minnie!

I couldn't say anything, because no words would come. I just looked at her, and I saw that she was crying softly and trying to speak. The sight of her looking so unhappy and yet so pretty loosened my tongue and I cried out:

"Minnie! Forgive me, Minnie!"

And then she smiled.

"I understand everything now," she says. "They tried to poison me against you, Bill, but whether all of what they say about you is true or not, I love you."

"Do you believe all that you read?" I asks.

"No!" she says.

"But it says in the papers, Babe, that I've got a wife and three children—what about that?"

Minnie blushed in that pretty way she has.

"That's all right," she says, softly. "Never worry about that, dear Bill. All good things come to those who wait."

One of the most exciting novels we have ever printed is this fine lumber town story by the author of "Timber" and "Spindrift."

The Story So Far:

TO the North Woods lumber town of Tincup came Ben Webster—looking, as he said, for a tough nut to crack. He found it.

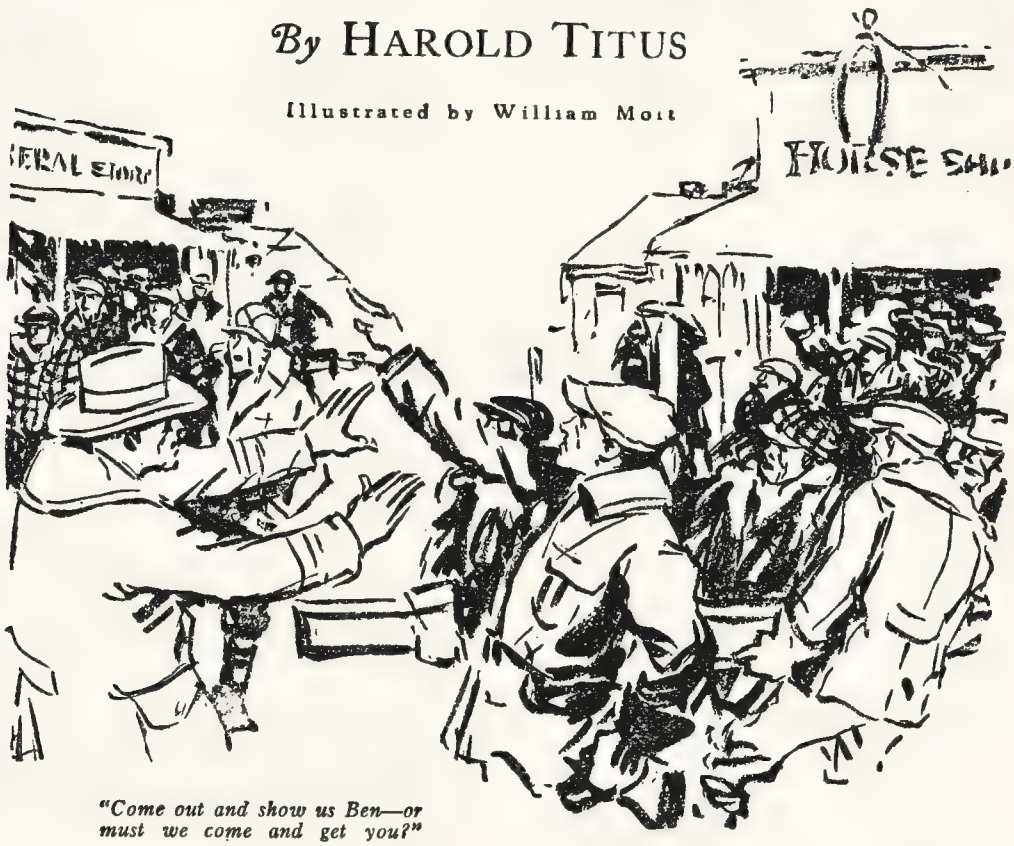
For Tincup was owned, body and soul, it seemed, by the lumber baron Nicholas Brandon; and it had been a long time since anyone had crossed him—which little thing Webster proceeded at once to do. It began at a log-birling contest held in celebration of Armistice day, when Webster showed his skill and knowledge of the game by defeating the local champion Bull Duval (Brandon's woods-boss) at that vigorous lumberman's sport. It continued when Webster championed the cause of a pathetic old-timer, Don Stuart, whom Brandon was trying to run out of town in spite of the fact that the old man had little longer to live and wished to spend the time among his friends in Tincup; Stuart, rumor said, "had something on" Brandon. The altercation ended in Webster's throwing Brandon on his neck in the mud, and in Webster's arrest—and fine of one dollar by Justice Abel Armitage, who was one of the few not under Brandon's thumb.

As a result of this acquaintance, Armitage employed Webster to manage a small lumbering operation which he was

The Tough Nut

By HAROLD TITUS

Illustrated by William Molt



"Come out and show us Ben—or must we come and get you?"

conducting as trustee on behalf of Dawn McManus, the young daughter of a former business associate of Brandon's. Years before, it seemed, upon the death of McManus' wife, he had taken to drinking heavily and Brandon had sent him out to a camp in charge of a trapper named Sam Faxson. Later Faxson had turned up dying from a gunshot wound and stated that McManus, denied whisky, had turned ugly; and when Faxson had tried to prevent his going to town for liquor, he had shot the trapper. McManus had disappeared, and had never been heard from.

Webster accepted the job, got the Hoot Owl mill going and licked Brandon's man Duval when he tried to intimidate the men. Old Stuart died—leaving a letter for Webster that was to be opened only when the going got too hard for him; and Webster put the letter away untouched.

And now began a long series of underhanded attacks upon Webster by those in Brandon's pay. The mill was set on fire—and barely saved. The bridge over which Webster's logging road passed was dynamited just before an important timber-delivery—and by desperate effort repaired just in time. And then, at a dance, in the presence of Dawn, with whom Webster had fallen in love, a notorious streetwalker hired by Brandon accosted Webster in a manner calculated to imply familiar acquaintance. And when Webster sought the girl to explain, he found she had gone home in tears to her old companion and housekeeper, Emma Coburn. *(The story continues in detail:)*

AUNT EM paused for breath. Her eyes flashed cold fire as she stood looking down at Nicholas Brandon.

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"There's nothing alive a body can lay a tongue to that's low enough to call you, Nick Brandon!" she went on. "Coyote—skunk—snake— They're respectable and kind, compared to you!"

Those flashing lights were higher in his black eyes now, and the cords of his neck muscles twitched.

"Oh, you did a good night's work Saturday, Nick Brandon, if you call it good to send a poor girl home with fear and humiliation; and to send a fine young man back to his camp under an unfair cloud!"

"You presume a great deal," Brandon replied in a well-controlled tone. "I? What have I to do with Webster's misfortunes?"

The woman grimaced.

"Most everything, I'd say! It's as plain as the nose on your face that that affair was cooked up, that it was somebody's scheme. And nobody in Tincup but you wants to make it hard going for the boy. Oh, I've stood quiet long enough! You're the one who's responsible for everything that's happened to the Hoot Owl. And you've covered your tracks so well that Dawn doesn't believe the stories people tell about you. But you haven't fooled Em Coburn, and the child will believe *me!*

"And there are other things, Nick Brandon! I've noticed how you look at her lately. I know what's in your mind!" She nodded, and he stirred sharply, those lights in his eyes flickering more brilliantly. "I know, and believe me, I'm standing between you and her innocence. I've kept my tongue still because the child's had enough to face, but take it from an old woman that her tongue's going to clack from now on!"

She breathed through pursed lips and glared at him.

"You are interesting," he said ironically.

"I'm tryin' to be! I'll manage to make it interesting for you or miss my guess. But if I should, if I should fall down, there's forces at work that'll upset your dirty plans. You can't beat this boy Webster! You can't lick him and drive him out as you've done to others. He's going to beat you at the Hoot Owl, and he's going to stay on, and all he's got to do to prove himself to Dawn is to stay here!"

HER voice dropped and she thumped the desk with her fist.

"You don't like that, do you? You think I'm crazy. I don't expect to show you that he's going to beat you yet; he'll have to do that himself, and he will! But I'm a woman; I know a girl's heart. I know that while this nasty trick you had this Lydia woman play has knocked 'em both flat, has kept her cryin' for days and nights, has made poor Ben sneak back to his job like a hurt animal, that you'll fail in the end!

"You've overlooked one thing, Nick Brandon: you haven't figured on youth! Those two are young; they're clean; they're plumb head over heels in love with one another; and lies can't keep 'em apart long! Mark my word: lies will out! No, you can't stop the young hearts, Brandon!"

He rose on that, as though the truth of her words had struck straight to his own heart, from which youth was gone.

"Get out!" he cried savagely.

She opened her mouth to defy him. An exulting smile lighted her face and then died.

"Get out!" he said again hoarsely, and advanced around the corner of his desk; and the look on his face, the same look which Ben Webster had observed when Brandon rushed him on Armistice Day, that look of murder, wiped out the woman's smile.

She retreated, fumbling behind her for the knob to the outer door, not daring to turn her back to him.

"I'll get out!" she said. "But I've spoken my piece and you'll live to know the truth of it!"

BRANDON tried the door after her to be certain that the latch had seated, then slipped a bolt. He wiped his forehead and with quickened breath returned to his desk. He drank deeply from the bottle this time. It was still another bottle. Liquor was going faster now, as Nicholas Brandon's great and secret fear rankled and grew complex, as Ben Webster eluded the efforts to drive him out, as Dawn McManus moved further away.

Brandon corked the bottle, closed the drawer. Then on a telegraph pad he scrawled an Ontario address. The message itself consisted of but two words: *"Send Red."*

He signed his name and sat back, brows drawn, and after a time nodded vindictively.

"We'll see," he muttered. "We'll see, about these youthful hearts!"

Meanwhile, out at the Hoot Owl, Ben Webster went through a week of agony.

Dawn had heard and seen and—believed! She had fled the hall, convincing him of

her belief in Lydia's strategic foul. Days had passed, and he had heard nothing from her. He was impelled to go to her, but under such circumstances a young man does not do that. There are some affairs so embarrassing that words fall flat.

His men knew the story, of course; all the country knew it. But none mentioned it to him, none willingly betrayed to him their knowledge of his humiliation, though some could not well cover their consciousness when he was about, and he well knew what was in their minds.

He had thought of going to Lydia herself and trying to force her to repair the damage she had done, but that would be an undertaking for which he had no resource, he knew. He could not handle women as he handled men. He had considered presenting his problem to Abel, but such action would admit his helplessness, and he was no quitter. He wanted to stand on his own feet, shape his own destiny. So he waited and suffered and tried to rally his self-possession.

He was walking, now, from camp to mill, having missed the afternoon train, swinging along through the last daylight of a fine January afternoon, following the road that wound through the old chopping, wondering grimly what Dawn was thinking then, what she was doing, hearing once again the biting voice of Lydia—hearing, in memory, the hush fall over that dance hall.

He was wholly alone. Far behind him loggers worked in the timber; down yonder the mill sent up its plume of smoke, and he could hear the distant puffing of the carriage exhaust in the stillness.

To the right and left lay the chopping, here and there a gaunt sapling standing above the windrows of slash. On the westward the standing timber was nearly a mile away; to the eastward, at that point, the wooded ridge was an eighth as far.

No wind blew; nothing stirred—that he could see. He could not observe that slight, cautious movement on the ridge to his left, that figure which watched him come, and edged out through young hemlocks to where his view was obscured.

The man up there stood still. Slowly he shook off his mittens, and with a bare thumb released the safety on the rifle he carried. He waited as Ben swung a bit nearer him when the road twisted eastward to avoid a knoll; he settled slowly to one knee, placing it on the tail of the other snowshoe. His breath was not just steady as he snuggled his cheek against the rifle stock. No man's would be, shooting from ambush that way. Nor were his hands just steady. . . . .

He sighted carefully, trying to still the tremor of his arms. He let his breath slip out slowly; he squeezed.

The crack of the rifle echoed and reëchoed across the chopping. The man who had been walking so swiftly lay still, as he had pitched on his face. One of his hands was outstretched, the other pinned beneath him. His face, one cheek in the snow, was turned toward the man who had fired.

For many minutes the man in the timber remained kneeling. Webster did not stir. Then, cautiously, he groped for the ejected shell, slipped it into his pocket, rose to his feet and stealthily struck into the forest.

ODD, how the human mind will function. As fast as the speed of light, thoughts, deductions, explanations will flash through the brain at times.

The rifle-bullet had passed so close above Ben's head that he had felt its breath even before he was aware of its whine.

For him! That bullet was for him and had missed by inches! Then he was pitching forward, simulating a fall, letting himself go limp. It was the only protection he could conjure.

His one arm, beneath his body, cramped, but he did not stir. He tried to hold his lungs flat so there would be no movement of his body. He half closed his eyes, but rolled them to command all the view possible.

He saw nothing, no movement, even; heard nothing. He was a-tingle, scalp creeping with an odd sensation; as he waited for another bullet from those heights to the eastward.

But no other came. The low beams of the sun lifted above the valley of the chopping, leaving him in shadow. Up yonder, a ruddy glow fell on bare maple and beech and on green hemlocks. And then, with a sound that he could hear even at that distance, a grouse rocketed out of the timber, turned, followed its edge, and plunged in again. . . . . A grouse, flying aimlessly? He did not think so, and his heart rapped his ribs smartly.

Ben lay there until deep dusk had fallen. Then he got to his hands and knees, watching, listening. After a moment he rose and

stood still. Then, resolutely, he left the road, wallowed through the deep snow, crossed the railroad track and toiled up the heights toward the point from which the grouse had burst from cover. Halfway to the timber he stopped and listened again. Only the distant booing of a great owl fell on his ears. He went on, toiling through the snow, to the first fringe of trees. Then he spoke, in a light hail—"Hi!"—and immediately dropped behind a stump.

AFTER a moment he rose, went forward again and entered the shadows boldly. No one was there, for certain, but before he had gone more than a few paces he came on that which he sought: a snowshoe track, visible in the gloom because of the softness of the snow. Whoever had gone that way had sunk deeply.

He followed this out of the thick timber to a little clearing in the edge of the forest where wind had had a chance to pack the snow. That wind had blown two days ago; last night light snow had sifted over it. The trail was not visible in the darkness, and so he struck a match and holding it cupped in one hand, bent low.

The flare showed the track of a long, narrow shoe plainly, and as he moved the tiny torch along toward its tip, he stopped all movement with a sudden low exclamation. The match burned out. He moved on to the next track and lighted another. Again he examined the imprint made by the shoe—and the next. Then he went as rapidly as possible back down the slope to the road and started back to camp.

The logging-crew looked up as he entered the cook-shanty and took a place at the table near Tim Jeffers. It was not usual for the boss to eat supper there.

After the meal Ben called Bird-eye Blaine to one side.

"I'd like to have you harness the supply team and spend an evening in town," he said.

The little barn-boss cocked an inquisitive eye.

"Just in town, Misther Webster? Or fer somethin' special?"

"Something special. But no one else is to know. What I want to find out is this: Who is wearing a pair of Canadian snowshoes with the webbing in the toe of one torn so it makes a hole about this shape?"

Quickly he sketched a rough outline on a leaf of his notebook. Bird-eye scanned it and nodded.

"Take it easy. Maybe you wont find out tonight. But make a start, anyhow. If you should have any luck, stop in at the siding. I'll ride that far with you."

IT was after midnight when Ben Webster roused from his sleepless bed to hear Bird-eye speaking softly to his team outside. He crawled out of his blankets and opened the office door to let the barn-boss in, but before he asked any questions, lighted a lamp.

"Well, how about it?"—as he replaced the chimney.

Bird-eye looked at him narrowly.

"I found the shoes," he said with an emphatic nod. "And I found whose they be!"

"Good!"

The barn-boss blinked.

"I dunno 'bout that. It aint so good, I'd say. They're the property," he said with profound emphasis, "av wan Red Bart Delaney, a celibrated killer from Canady!"

In the second small bedroom separated from the office by a board partition, a bed creaked sharply. Webster gave no heed.

"So that's it!" he said softly.

"Yis! That's ut! The prisence av a rattlesnake loike Red Bart in the community don't forecast nawthing but the hottest kind av trouble! Ye've heard av him, aint ye?"

"Yes, I have. He was mixed up in that spruce war on the Zhing-Wauk. A hired killer! What else did you find out?"

Bird-eye twisted his head gravely.

"Well, he brought his ugly presince into Tincup on Wednesday noight. He's favorin' Joe Piette's hotel. The snowshoes was in the office, an' it come up so's I didn't have to seem curious to foind out whose they was. He's here lookin' fer cedar, he says. But it gives a body a lot av bother wonderin' what his *rale* reason moight be."

"I can tell you," Ben said. "He's gunning for me, Bird-eye."

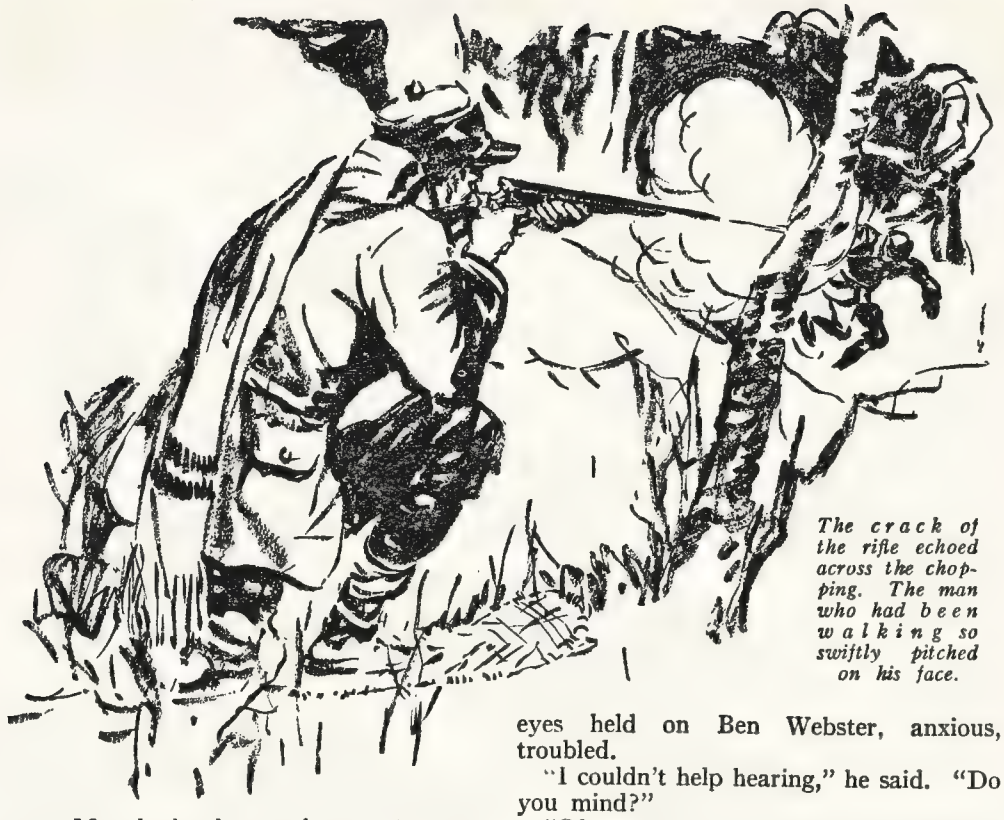
"Saints! I thought ut, I did! Ah, me b'y—"

"Yes, he started today. I was shot at with a rifle two miles up the road just at sundown. The man who shot wore a snowshoe with the web broken. He wouldn't be lending his snowshoes."

Bird-eye stood motionless and silent for a moment.

"Thin the sooner we give him both barrels av somethin', the safer ye'll be, Misther Webster! He's a harrd chunk, him!"

"No. That wont do. I've never seen the



The crack of the rifle echoed across the chopping. The man who had been walking so swiftly pitched on his face.

man. Men don't take pot-shots at strangers for no reason at all. I don't want to start anything with Delaney until I find out why he came into this country."

"That's as plain as a mole on a colleen's chin!" the other cried. "It's Nick Brandon, who's tried everything else, and who'll not rafuse to try murder to get ye down, Benny b'y!"

"Likely you're right," Ben said, and rubbed his chin with a knuckle. "But we'd have to prove that, first. There's nothing to worry about, now we know the man's here to get me. But I've got to let him go until we find a way to hang the blame where it belongs—that is, unless he leaves town. Likely, he thought he got me. Still there, was he? Um. . . . . Well, it's something to think over, Bird-eye. You better hit for camp, now, and get some sleep. I may call you in the forenoon."

Bird-eye sniffed and twisted his head to indicate grave thought, and after warning Ben to stay close to the office, departed.

HE could be heard unblanketing his team and when the sleigh-runners creaked, sounds came from that second bedroom behind the partition, the door opened and John Martin stood looking out. His dark eyes held on Ben Webster, anxious, troubled.

"I couldn't help hearing," he said. "Do you mind?"

"Of course not, John! Looks like lively times!"

The bookkeeper did not respond to this lightness. He shook his head as he walked out and stood in his nightshirt with back to the stove, a tall, full-boned figure with his mass of black hair on head and face.

"It's none of my affair, Webster, but I'm an older man than you. I've seen trouble —a-plenty." His voice dropped significantly. "I've heard of Delaney. Every man in the timber has heard of the Zhing-Wauk war. I can't help but think that Bird-eye's advice is good."

"I can't see it that way, now. We might raise the devil with Delaney, but that would only be like eliminating the symptom of a disease. We've got to get at what and who is behind him."

"Ah, but you have yourself to think of in the meantime. I—I don't trust you in this, Ben!"—with a wistful smile.

"How so?"

"Because you've never known what it is to be afraid. You don't know the meaning of fear, and so you don't know the meaning of caution. This is a time for caution!"

"I'll not walk into any traps, but if Brandon thinks he can make me hunt my hole—"

"Oh, Brandon!" Bitterly came the cry from Martin's lips, and he threw his arms wide in a gesture of helplessness. "Brandon! How one comes to hate the sound of his name!" His voice was congested with emotion, and Ben stared up at him in surprise. John Martin was not the type of man one would look to for such an outburst.

"Well, just hating him wont get us anywhere," Ben said mildly.

"No! But you've got to watch him as you've never watched a man in your life. Why, son, you don't *know*, you don't *dream*, of the ends he'll go to!"

Webster's brow puckered. Martin was profoundly moved, deeply in earnest.

"But I thought you didn't know him," he said, puzzled. "I thought you said you were a stranger to this country."

"Yes. . . . . But stories travel. And isn't your experience today enough to convince anyone of the man's ruthlessness?"

"Oh, sure," Ben agreed, still wondering why a steady-going, mature man should be so moved by mere tales.

"You're right. He'll stop at nothing, not even murder. And I agree with you that he's got to be watched. But if I holed up and waited for somebody else to clear this thing up, he'd gain part of what he's after, you see. No, that can't be done."

HE rose and began to pace the floor.

"And it's not only the Hoot Owl, now, that's at stake. He's mixed up in more important matters than property. He caught me foul where it hurt—*hurt!*" Martin, following him with his eyes, winced. "He's used everything from bullies to dynamite to tie up this job. He's used a woman to come between me and the finest girl that ever walked the earth! And now he brings in a hired killer! Darned if I know what to expect next. But one thing he can bank on: I wont run. I'll drive him into the open if I can, but I *wont run!*"

"No, I know you wont. But I wish—oh, *how* I wish you'd counsel with some one else, with Abel or anyone. You're young, you're in danger. . . . . And this matter you just mentioned: Can't you think of Dawn a little? If you love her, can't you see that she has a right to believe that you will protect yourself?"

The man's voice had fallen to a broken whisper. He held out both hands in appeal, and tears sprang to his eyes. This mature, quiet gentleman, this man who was a stranger to the country, begging him with tears in his eyes and voice to consider Dawn McManus! Ben was dumfounded.

"Oh, it's only that you've shown yourself to be so decent," Martin said after a moment, emotions under better control. "I hate to see you putting yourself in danger."

"I wont stick my head into any noose," Ben replied. "Lord, it's late. We'll need clear heads to meet this situation. Better get into the old blankets."

But he did not sleep at once. He lay awake a long time, thinking of Red Bart Delaney and Brandon, and wondering how he could prove their relationship—and speculating on Martin's outbursts, his keen hatred of Brandon, whom he probably had never seen, his intense interest in Dawn McManus. . . . . Something strange and unnatural, there, Webster told himself. Still, he mused, you could stake your last hope on a man like John Martin.

CHAPTER XX

EARLY next forenoon the merchants and traders and loafers in the business places on Tincup's main thoroughfare saw something to nip their attention.

Ben Webster came driving into town at a spanking trot, his team of alert drivers coated with frost. This was nothing unusual. But when he brought them to a crunching halt before the bank building, over which Nicholas Brandon worked and lived, jumped out, threw blankets over their backs and tied them to a post, a few necks were craned.

Necks craned, then, yes; various and sundry ejaculations of surprise and amazement were spoken, however, when with a businesslike, intent stride the young Hoot Owl boss crossed the sidewalk, flung open the door and started taking the stairs two at a time. That flight led to but one place: the Brandon offices.

Throughout the evening before, Nicholas Brandon had gorged himself on a sense of relief. At eight he had passed Bart Delaney on the street. None had been about to notice that, although Brandon appeared only to overtake and pass the man, in reality, they had spoken briefly and cautiously.

"Well?"

"In his tracks. . . . . Two mile above th' mill."

"Was he alone?"

"Sure. . . . . They'll find him stiff. . . . . When do we settle?"

"As soon as the bank opens tomorow."

Inside, Brandon seethed with a savage exultation. He crossed the street, drunk with the feeling, mounted to his office and drank to his own success—and drank again. For hours he sat at his desk, whisky bottle at his elbow; and when he went down the hallway to his bedroom he carried the bottle with him.

His first move for the day, once in his office, was to draw the cork of a fresh bottle and drink deeply. His hands shook, and he shuddered as the whisky burned its way down his throat. That was better. . . . . It was not comfortable to wake up, thinking of a man lying on the snow—at your orders.

Soon now, word would be coming from Hoot Owl, tragic, final word. . . . . The whisky gurgled as he drank again greedily. He must be in shape to meet the news dispassionately. No one would know; none would guess. Delaney had papers to establish a legitimate errand; Delaney would not disappear at once. The rifle was in the bottom of the river, as prearranged.

"Webster is dead; Webster is dead."

The words spun about in his mind, a savage chant; and Brandon wanted to be glad but could not. He sat down a bit unsteadily and put the fresh bottle back in its drawer. He should have eaten a bit before drinking. Easy to say that, now; but when one awakened to think of a young man lying on the snow. . . . .

Webster was gone, though. The Hoot Owl was at his mercy; and Dawn—

And then he turned to the opening door.

His jaw sagged, a light sound came from his throat as the breath drained out. . . . . Ben Webster, standing there, smiling good-naturedly at him!

But dead men do not stand up—not men left dead on the snow. . . . . Men whose life you have had taken do not smile—men stiff on the snow cannot smile. This combination of truth coupled in Brandon's swirling mind and struck him cold. This could be no man, then; this was an apparition, this was—

And then whatever it was spoke.

"Good morning, Brandon!"

He spoke naturally, easily, and closed the door behind him. Dead men do not speak; ghosts do not open and close doors. . . . . They pass *through* them.

And Nicholas Brandon, gathering his faculties, lurched to his feet, panting and clenching the edge of the desk.

"Good morning," he said in a hoarse gasp. "Good—"

At that, as he strained to swallow and say more, as he fought for self-control to drive back the last shadow of that unholy fright which had shaken him—at that, Ben Webster laughed bitterly.

"What's the difficulty, Brandon? Didn't you expect to see me this morning?"

He thrust his head a bit forward on that question to drive home the implication.

"Why, I—that is, I thought—"

Ben stepped close and dropped his voice to a whisper.

"You thought I wouldn't be walking today? Was that it?"

ON the question Brandon straightened, shoving himself away from the desk. His physical vigor swam up to meet the emergency and some of the bewilderment passed from his eyes.

"Not walking? I don't know what you mean."

"Then, maybe, it's useless for me to come in and report that I'm on the job yet. But I'll do it nevertheless. It might save you some—suspense."

"I don't know what you're talking about." The man's self-control was coming back rapidly, now.

"We wont argue that point. I can't argue with a rascal." Ben's smile was dying, a hardness creeping up behind it into those gray eyes. "Whether you know or not, you might be able to guess, provided you have any curiosity at all.

"I just came in to get matters straight, Brandon. Things have happened to the Hoot Owl, but the Hoot Owl is booming; now, I presume, I can look for things to happen to *me*. Before anything does,—because I'm not rash enough to be cocksure,—I want you to get me straight."

The last vestige of Ben's smile was gone by then. He stood spread-legged, hands locked behind his back, head thrusting further forward.

"I'm not interested in—"

"But you'll listen!" Those words, and a savage, imperious gesture of one hand, cut Brandon short.

"You'll listen, or I'll choke you until you'll beg to listen, Brandon! You'll listen to me this morning, and it'll be the first and only time.

"I know a great deal. I can prove but

little. I know that you started in to run me out by sending Duval to clean up my camp. Next you tried to cripple my operation by having a fire-bug touch off the mill. Next you or your men stole a piston-head out of the express—"

"Don't go too far, young man!"

"I wont. The pits of hell are the inside limits for you, Brandon!

"After that you timed it nicely and blew up my trestle. You almost had us two or three times. You swapped molasses for oil and tried to spread distemper in my barn for good measure. . . . . But—you flopped! The Hoot Owl is up on its knees, will be on its feet in a month if we keep going, and it'll be sitting on the world by the time break-up hits us. . . . . All you've done to the job has only helped it. I've got a crew out there that'd go to hell for the operation, and that'll see you in hell before they quit!

"That's that! Next you try to get me, thinking, probably, that if you knock the skipper off the bridge, the craft will founder. You're wrong, there. You can't lick my men; you can't stop the Hoot Owl by getting me. But if you want to try, it's your own funeral. I've only one thing to ask of you: try to play the man, Brandon, and fight your own fights!"

WEBSTER'S face was dark with rage, now, and he emphasized his last words by downward thrusts of clenched hands along his thighs.

Brandon smiled lightly.

"You're a queer young man," he remarked. "You dream in broad daylight and with your eyes open."

"A peculiarly detailed dream, Brandon! I've said all I have to say about the job and about myself, but there are two other matters:

"First, I've a letter you want to get hold of. And you want it badly enough to make a careful set-up to steal it. Luck was with me; I happened to catch your rat in the nick of time. But I give you my word on this: I'll not open that letter until the job gets too difficult, until the nut refuses to be cracked. If that time comes and you keep striking from behind, so help me, I'll open it!"

Brandon had paled and moistened his lips. He held himself steady but evidently at great cost, and would not trust himself to speak further than a jeering: "How generous!"

"And one more item: I wont even mention her name in your hearing, but any man who would pull a trick like that and involve a girl—Brandon, a snake's belly is sky-high compared to you!"

And that touched the wellsprings of rage that had been dammed back until the moment.

"You fool!" Brandon said heavily. The words came like the first break in a levee—slow, sluggish words. And then, like the following toss of foam was the frothing rage in his scream. "You *fool!* I'll drive you out of this country! I'll hang your operation up for the crows to pick! I'll string the bones of this timber and your own bones across this country!" He swung his arms in wide, wild gestures. "And as for that letter—I don't care a damn what the fool wrote! He was a drunken bum, an ingrate, who hated me for keeping him alive! He lied! Whatever he said, he lied! And you've no proof that I've tried to get it. No proof!"

He stopped, sobbing for breath, and his teeth clicked in an agony of passion.

"Dawn? Not mention her name? Well, I will! She's mine, you fool, body and soul! She's been mine for years. Because she smiled at you, because she played with you, don't think she's interested, fool! She's—"

He swayed back as Webster lurched forward, but their bodies did not lock.

White and trembling, Ben stayed his own rush.

"No! Don't want to brawl over her," he choked. "But if you mention her name to me again, I'm likely to lose my head and tear your hide off!"

His rage was so high, so holy, that the fear it inspired carried through Brandon's frenzy, and the man stood silent.

Ben relaxed.

"Now," he said, "I've just one thing to ask, Brandon. It's this: fight your own battles!"

He turned on his heel and slammed the door behind him.

CHAPTER XXI

BEN began unblanketing his team with the haste of high temper, but before he had finished, Abel Armitage hailed him from across the street and came hurrying through the rutted snow.

The old Justice's face was set in an ex-

pression of concern, and he came close before he spoke.

"I hear Red Bart Delaney's in town."

Ben nodded grimly. "Came to see me yesterday."

"No!"

"Yeah. Took a long look at me—over the sights of a rifle."

"Ben! Why, *son!*"

Webster laughed mirthlessly and told what had happened in the Hoot Owl chopping the day before. When he related Bird-eye's success in finding the snowshoes and their owner, Abel removed a mitten and rubbed his face vigorously with the palm of his hand.

"So he's gotten down to hiring a killer!" He looked anxiously into Ben's eyes. "Son—it can't go on. Timber or no timber, success or failure for the Hoot Owl, you've got to think of yourself!"

"I'm doing that. I've just been to see Brandon and tried to drive him into the open. That's all I ask of any man: that he fights fair."

"And if he wont, what?"

"Then I'll have to smoke him out!"

Abel clicked his tongue.

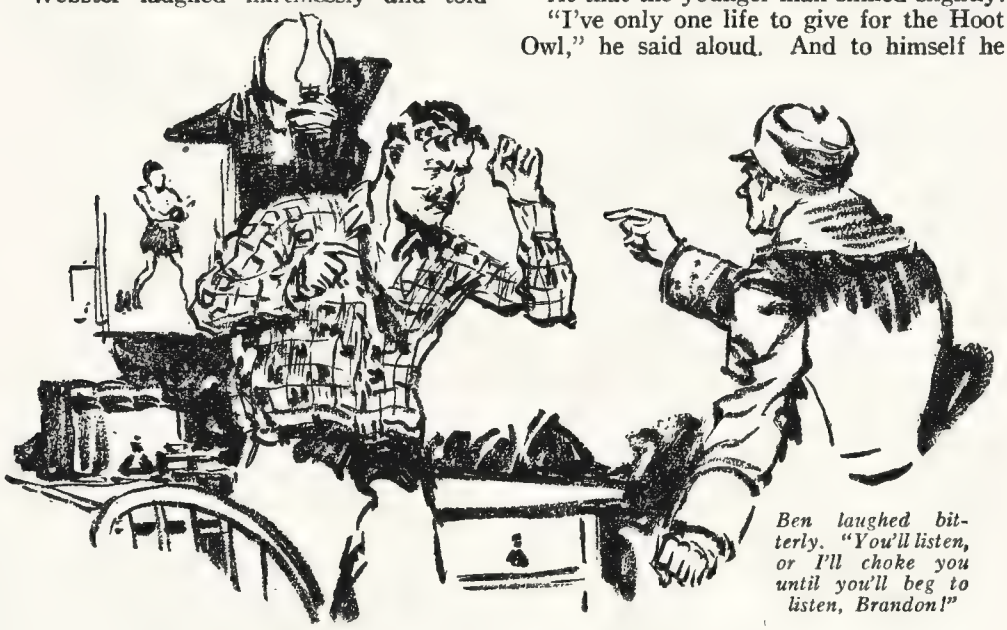
"Benny, your very nerve scares me! Why, this can't go on. It mustn't! It's your own affair, for sure, when he tries to shoot you down, but I'm going to beg you to be careful. So long as Delaney's in the country, you've got to keep low. Get back to camp, stay there; let me pick some men I can trust to follow Bart and Brandon night and day so you'll not be caught!"

"No." Ben shook his head resolutely. "I'll go on about my business as I should. I've never run yet and don't like to start any fast footwork now."

"But it's your *life* that's at stake, Ben!"

At that the younger man smiled slightly.

"I've only one life to give for the Hoot Owl," he said aloud. And to himself he added: "And to the owner of the property."



Ben laughed bitterly. "You'll listen, or I'll choke you until you'll beg to listen, Brandon!"

"Don't be silly. That's what recklessness is: downright silly! That's not like you. Why, not taking precautions in this thing is like monkeying with a high-tension wire."

"No good, Abel. I couldn't hold up my head if I hid out from them."

SO Abel gave up after a time and shuffled off up the street, drawing off his mitten again and rubbing his face briskly with his palm.

He had only reached his office and was unlocking the door when Aunt Em, walking grimly as if with a definite purpose, approached.

"Good morning—" he began.

"Forget the palaver, Abel Armitage!" the woman said sharply. "I watched you talking to that boy and I saw you rubbin' your face with your hand, and I know what that means. You're in trouble. So are we all, maybe. That's why I came to see you.

Is it true that this Red Bart Delaney has showed up in Tincup?"

"As true as disease or death or anything else unpleasant."

"That's what I'd heard! Do I have to guess why he's come?"

Abel untied his scarf and shook his head sadly.

"No, Em. Your first guess will be right. And he shot at Benny yesterday!"

The woman's mouth twitched, and quick tears brimmed on her lids, but her voice was steady enough.

"And missed, I'd judge from the look of him just now. But if Delaney's still here, there'll be a next time; and he wont miss then. Did you do your duty and send the boy to some safe place?"

ABEL sighed and told her of his talk with Ben. She listened without interruption, and as he told of Ben's determination to go about his affairs as he pleased despite the presence of Delaney, a look of high fright fixed itself in her eyes.

"So you couldn't make him listen to reason!" she muttered. "Well, if you can't, I can't. And, us failing, there's only one other who might."

"Dawn?"

She nodded. "Dawn could. But she wont. She wont go to him now. She wouldn't even listen to talk of him, she's in such a state!"

"How is she today?"

"Cried her eyes out all night. Oh, it's a sweet week I've had with that child! I'll never forget to my dyin' day the look on her face when she come flyin' home from the dance Saturday night! Why, it seemed she'd never be able to listen or talk so a body could find out what ailed her. And when she did sob it out, it was fit to wring your heart!

"My—oh, my! After all these years of feeling alone in the world and bein' pointed out as the child of a murderer, it seemed as if a little joy and happiness was to come her way. She's to the ears in love with Ben Webster or I've got three legs! And then to have that scandalous woman do what she did and upset it all!"

She sat down heavily in a chair and drew a great breath.

"I don't have to ask you or any other man about Ben Webster, Abel! I know the clean folks when I see 'em. I'd bet my reputation as a Christian woman on him! That piece of play-acting was some of Brandon's work, you can bet your last red cent!

"Well, what I'm gettin' at is this: The boy's in danger of bein' murdered every minute of day and night unless he takes your advice. There's no one left to try to talk him into being careful but Dawn. . . . . And how am I going to get her to see her duty, when she goes into a cryin' fit every time his name's mentioned?"

"She doesn't yet see that the affair was a put-up job, then?"

"See? She can't see anything, Abel Armitage! Suppose you were a young girl who's had the things to bear that she has; and suppose you fell in love for the first time; and suppose that your young man was accused of such nastiness right in public with everybody listening? Would you stop to figure that the reason he seemed guilty was natural? That the thing was so far from the truth that he was all kerflumoxed? I should say you wouldn't! You'd do just what she's doin': make yourself sick with cryin'!"

She twitched at the skirts of her cloak irritably and glared at the old Justice as though he were a sworn enemy instead of a friend.

"Abel, there aint any time to lose. She should patch up her misunderstanding with him right today—right this hour—and use her influence to persuade him to keep low. But how it's to be done— For Lord's sake, Abel, aint you got a single suggestion to your *back?*"

The Justice had been stuffing light wood into his stove during this. Now he lighted the tinder, opened the drafts and stood with hands behind him, rusty overcoat unbuttoned and drooping, deep in thought.

"It's difficult to get anyone in her state to use reason. Maybe the shock of knowing that Ben's life is in danger would be a counter-irritant to this other shock. Maybe not. If the affair of last week could be cleared up, if Dawn could be shown that this Lydia woman was only carrying out a plan! But I wonder—"

Aunt Em made no response. She stiffened slowly in her chair. She looked hard at Abel and her eyes narrowed a trifle.

"You see," he resumed, "if the girl—"

"Hold on, Abel Armitage!" she cut in, flinging up a hand in warning. "Hold on, now! I've got to think. And I can't think while you carry on your gabble! You leave me alone, now—keep your tongue still. . . . .

"I've got it!" she cried excitedly after a moment. "I've got it, now! You stay right here, Abel! You stay until I come back. If it works, it works. If it don't, it'll be time to talk some more!"

SHE moved resolutely to the door, left the office and strode down the street. People of Tincup watched her pass; people she had known for years spoke to her and drew no response, not even so much as a glance or a nod. On past the bank, the post office, the pool-room—beyond all the stores on down to the depot.

There, on the shoveled platform, she stood a long interval staring across the tracks to that short row of houses on Section Thirty-seven, bleak and bare in the morning sunlight, with shades drawn at their windows as if to shut out the sweet light of day, alone and huddled, seeming to shrink together.

The agent came out of the office and looked at Em in surprise.

"Hello!" he cried. "What brings you down here before—"

"Homer," she cut in grimly, "in which one of them nasty places does this Lydia woman live?"

"Why—why, how should I know?" he evaded, a flush creeping up from his collar.

"This is no time for bein' secretive out of modesty, Homer Lathrop! Answer my question! Where does this Lydia live?"

"Wh-why, in the one at this end, I think. I'm not sure, of course. . . . . I think she does, though. She—"

But he no longer had a listener. Resolutely, slowly, with something like defiant majesty, Aunt Em crossed the tracks, with never another word and never a look to right or left. She followed one of the several paths that crossed the railroad yards. Her head was up, her mouth set, eyes blazing. A teamster, riding into town on squealing runners, looked at her and scratched his head. A woman up by the stores shaded her eyes and peered at the moving figure and stared and stopped. Aunt Em Coburn, headed for Thirty-seven? Why, it couldn't be!

But all things, even that, are possible. Em mounted the steps. She rapped at length and vigorously on the scarred panel of the door. She went within, leaving a dozen long-distance watchers to wonder.

It was long before she emerged, and then—ah, *then* Tincup had a sight to see, a subject for speculation! For by Aunt Em's side moved the woman Lydia, collar of her fur coat high about her face as if to hide the traces of tears which hastily applied powder could not eradicate.

Tears from those hard eyes? Nothing less! For women know women, and before Aunt Em had talked to this outcast five minutes, she had discovered the weakness in her shame, the clean spot left in her heart. And how Emma Coburn could talk! She talked that clean spot to a growing, glowing, glorious thing. She talked Lydia out of her house, across the tracks; talked her into that slow, unashamed, almost flagrant march up the main street; talked her out of all but one look of misgiving at the windows of Nicholas Brandon's offices—talked her around the corner and in beneath the hemlocks which whispered above the snug white house. They entered where Dawn McManus had hidden since the woman's words sent her flying from the dance-hall to the sanctuary of Aunt Em's understanding arms.

CHAPTER XXII

ALL the way out to camp, Dawn McManus snuggled close against Abel in his great buffalo coat. Now and again she trembled a bit; once she cried softly a few minutes. But much of the time she talked—talked as only a girl can whose heart is swollen with fear and regret and misgivings.

"To think it was the man I used to call Uncle who did that thing!" she cried. "Why haven't you told me, Abel? Why haven't you warned me?"

Abel flicked the off-horse with his whip.

"What he's done, what he's been, what he is, were no things for you, Dawn, girl. I just tried—to stand between you and many unpleasant things. You've had your share."

He felt her shudder at that.

"I could have stood this one more," she replied stoutly enough. "It hasn't been so bad these last few years, knowing that everybody thinks my father a murderer. It used to frighten me, the way they looked at me and nudged one another and whispered. I'd just gotten myself above that; and now—and now—"

She choked up, and the old man looked at her tenderly as the team slowed on a hill.

"What now?" he asked gently.

Through her tears she looked bravely at him.

"When a man loves a girl, that girl can't let herself love him, can she, when she's under a cloud? She can't bring a man's children into the world and have them whispered about as the grandchildren of a murderer?"

"Dawn! Dawn, girl, don't think that! Why, it's—"

"But it's *so,* Abel! I don't wa-want to talk about it much. I can't tell him, you see. But you must know and understand. All I can do for Ben now is to let him know how weak I was to doubt him, and to use any influence I may have to save his life. I will do that; I must do that because it is duty. But it must stop there. This other —can't go on, you see—not while I have nothing more than my faith in my father's good name."

Abel, wise man that he was, did not force the argument, and after a time she said:

"Oh, Nicholas Brandon! And to think! He's looked at me lately as if—as if—" She shuddered again.

ABEL brought his team to a halt before the Hoot Owl office, gave the reins to Dawn and stepped out.

As he opened the door and looked within, he saw that Martin, the bookkeeper, was the only occupant of the place.

"Where's Ben?" he asked.

The bearded man looked over his shoulder, looked at Abel, and then his gaze went past the man to the waiting cutter where Dawn sat. Her eyes were on him, large and inquiring, wide with trouble.

He started from his chair, and the pen, dropped from flexed fingers, rolled across the ledger-sheet. He made a faint sound, and his eyes lighted with a fire that startled Abel.

"What's wrong, Martin?" he asked in alarm, stepping quickly into the room. "Sick?"

The other took a deep, unsteady breath and looked away. Then he shook his head.

"No—all right, now," he said, as if with great effort. "Ben? In the mill, I think."

He picked up his pen, then, and bent over his work. A queer happening, Abel thought, and eyed the man closely; but when Martin gave evidence of being completely absorbed in his task, the old Justice turned and with a perplexed frown went out, closing the door.

He crossed the mill-yard, looking for Ben; and as he went, Martin rose cautiously from his chair, moved quietly to be in line with the window and stared for a long interval at the girl huddled in the robes, so still, so pale. His hands worked and his breath was uneven.

"Dawn is here to see you," Abel said quietly as he encountered Ben.

"Dawn?" Webster's voice was strangely pinched on the query.

"Yes. She had me bring her out so she could talk to you. She's waiting over by the office."

Ben gave no sign of recognition as he approached the cutter, made no salutation as he came near the girl who sat watching him so steadily. He only spoke her name, low, tremulously, when he had reached her side. She gave him a small gloved hand and smiled wanly.

"I've come to say many things, Ben," she began in a strange, strained voice. "To beg forgiveness, to beg other things—perhaps to explain."

She paused, and Ben thought her eyes misted a trifle as she looked away. She made an effort to withdraw her hand, but he held it in both his and she let it settle back, content.

"A week ago tonight, I ran out of the dance-hall and on home, thinking that that woman was honest. I thought that because my faith in things is not what it should be, because I am weak. The time since then, until noon today, has been a nightmare.

"Lydia came to my house at noon. She explained everything."

"She? She came—"

Dawn nodded sadly.

"Aunt Em brought her. Aunt Em went to her house and convinced her that she had done a terrible thing to you, and that an explanation to me was the only way to right the wrong. Lydia told me everything. . . . . It was Mr. Brandon who thought out the plan and forced her to do it under threats of some sort. She didn't tell us what the threats were, but left our house for the train and is gone away from Tincup. And I've come to tell you how mean I feel to think that I was weak enough to act just as that man believed that I would act."

Relief was singing through Webster, relief and a great, swelling joy, lifting him above rage for Brandon.

"Oh, I'm glad!" he said. "I've—why, it completely knocked me off my pins!

As Webster spoke to his horses, a shadowy figure appeared, crouched and stealthy.

Dawn, it's been terrible for you, but—but this makes me so happy!"

"I'm happy because you are happy," she said, but something in her tone and expression dampened his enthusiasm, checked his soaring spirits. She was so calm, so steady, so restrained—not at all like one who comes to wipe out heart-breaking misunderstanding. "And I'll never forgive myself for—for falling into the trap that was set for me!"

"Why shouldn't you? Any girl would have. But it's explained now. Let's forget it and begin where we left off, and find peace and—"

The sharp shake of her head and the quick withdrawal of her hand cut him off.

"There are sterner things to think of, first—quite different things, Ben. That is why I came out here, to talk to you about Bart Delaney. Abel has told me what happened yesterday."

Webster's face darkened.

"He shouldn't have done that. It's my fuss, and no one can help me in it."

"That's the trouble: you don't take it seriously enough. Abel's advice was good: stay here, let Abel have the man and Brandon watched; keep safe until you're certain that the danger is past."

"Hide and skulk while other men protect me? A man can't do that, Dawn! I'll be on my guard, of course. But I can't run away from anybody who is trying to strike from behind. What would these boys here on the job think of me if I did?"

"They'd think it wise. They'll think you're downright reckless and silly if you don't go carefully! Tim Jeffers and Buller both will agree with Abel. Every last one of them would want to protect and shelter you and—"

"But I can't *let* them! This man Delaney may be a hobgoblin for this country, but he isn't for me! I've been to see Brandon; next I'll see Delaney if I can find him. No, I've got to stand my ground!"

She bit her lips and suddenly leaned forward, tense with emotion.

"Oh, I'm asking it as your good friend, Ben! I'm begging you to stay where you'll be safe. Wont you do that for me?"

He laughed gently at her.

"Abel and the others have gotten you all in a fluster, Dawn! I can't do that even for you. I'm coming to Tincup tonight, and when I've finished my errands I'll come to see you and talk you into the right way of looking at this."

She went a trifle pale and fresh trouble showed in her eyes. "Don't," she begged.

"But I can't keep away from you, now that this other mess has been explained!"

She shook her head.

"I'm asking two things of you: The first is to stay here; the other is not to come to see me. Please!"

She put a hand on his with that plea, and he frowned.

"I can understand your being a little timid about having me around town, but I can convince you that I'm right. It's Brandon or me, now, you see. If I run, he wins. . . . . But this other: Dawn, don't you *want* me to see you?"

The girl's lips worked.

"No," she said, ever so faintly. "No. . . . . Oh, please don't argue with me, Ben! Please don't come to see me. You don't understand. You may never understand. . . . . But I'm begging you not to come and see me again!"

"No, I don't understand. It's—why—"

He laughed in his bewilderment; and Abel, in the near distance, mistook that laugh born of distress for one of relief, and came toward them.

"Well, have you two got matters cleared up?" he asked.

Dawn nodded silently. Webster rubbed his chin with a knuckle.

"Some things are cleared up," he said. "But there are others. . . . . Dawn, wont you explain?"

The girl turned her face to Abel. "I'm ready to go home now," she said weakly.

CHAPTER XXIII

TEAMS drove from Hoot Owl toward town through the falling snow that evening. First went Ben Webster, alone and sending his drivers at a spanking trot, perplexed, wondering.

Why was Dawn so obdurate in this matter of having him come to see her? Why that odd repression, as though she struggled to keep from saying the things that were bursting her heart?

His inability to answer those questions drove him into a dogged mood. He felt like blaming Brandon for this, as well as other troubles. He would go into Tincup and walk the streets and do the things he had to do as he had done them before. He might even manufacture duties to show Brandon that he had fear neither for him nor his killers!

A half-hour behind him came a team from camp, driven by Bird-eye Blaine, who had muttered to himself now and then until he passed the mill and swung into the main road. A figure ahead stepped out of the ruts and awaited his approach.

"Town?" the man cried.

"Yup. . . . . Hello, Martin! Whoa!"

Blaine lifted the robes for the bookkeeper and then drove on.

"Misther Webster gone in?" he asked. "He has, eh? An' Misther Red Bart Delaney still persecutin' the country with his presince, loikely. Ah, the b'y, the b'y!"

Martin proved to be uncommunicative, however, and they drove much of the way in silence.

Ben turned his team into an alley, hitched and blanketed them under the lee of the pool-room and then made his way between buildings to the thoroughfare which was lighted by glaring store fronts. The usual Saturday-night crowd was there, and as he passed up and down he sensed that people turned to watch him with unusual interest.

He purchased some articles in a clothing store and did not see Dawn McManus enter, observe him, and then withdraw. When he went out again, he did not notice that the girl followed him, waited outside while he bargained for a month's supply of meat in a butcher-shop, and trailed along behind when he emerged.

From place to place he went, Dawn behind him in the flying snow, and when she had been following so for half an hour, her eyes alert for others who might be watching him, another fell into the train ahead of her. She saw this man step from a store entrance and follow Ben. She hastened to be close, and not until she was abreast of him did she recognize John Martin, whom she had seen but once before.

When Webster went into the drug-store she stood out of the light to the eastward of the building and noted that Martin loitered near. When Ben reappeared, Martin followed.

FOR the better part of an hour this continued, while the snow fell thicker; and then Webster, laden with packages, turned into a side-street and made the next turn into the alley where he had left his team.

Two figures followed him, hastening a bit as he disappeared into the gloom. The wind drove the hissing snow into drifts between the buildings as Martin followed Ben, as Dawn trailed both.

And then, as Webster drew close and spoke to his horses, another shadowy figure appeared—a blur in the darkness, a swiftly moving blur, emerging from deep shadows, crouched and stealthy. The figure swept

forward; an arm drew back and upward; it struck, and with a muffled shout Ben Webster turned, falling sidewise and backward under the impact. . . . .

Another shout now; a cry as John Martin ran forward; and the indistinct figure which was poised over Webster, about to strike again, hesitated, whirled and fled.

"What is it, son?" Martin cried hoarsely as he dropped to his knees beside Ben, who had slumped into the snow. Before a reply could come, Dawn was there.

"Knife!" Ben gasped. "In the neck—here—"

John Martin unbuttoned Webster's overcoat, ripped open his shirt, and his fingers encountered a warm, sticky gush as he thrust them in.

"Knifed you! . . . . Ah, son!"

Dawn peered close into the bearded man's face as though fearful of what he might say next.

"We've got to get him somewhere," Martin muttered. "Got to. It's bad."

"My house is just around the corner!" she cried. "Bring him there. . . . . Oh, hurry!"

Together they lifted Ben to his feet. His teeth ground shut to keep back the moans. He was sick and weak with pain. He could feel his blood smearing over his side and back. He sagged against Martin as the man supported him.

"Tough, Dawn—to get you mixed up—in a mess—" he muttered.

"Hurry!" she said. "He's so weak!"

Weak indeed! Their arms about him, they moved through the snow. Webster did not lose consciousness, but his feet lagged, and he could not even reply to their words of encouragement. He felt Dawn close to him, and closed his eyes almost happily. He struggled to help himself so he would not burden her, but he stumbled and nearly fell, and another gush of blood bathed his body. Things began to buzz in his head; the storm seemed to close in, blotting out all light, but he kept on, swaying and lurching. After ages of effort, a glare pained his eyes, a warm breath fanned his face—and Aunt Em, standing in the doorway, was saying sharply: "In here. Your room, Dawn—I'll phone the doctor."

EMORY SWEET worked rapidly, once there. Martin, in his shirt-sleeves, helped; and Dawn, tight-lipped, pale-faced, held the light for them.

"Deep!" the Doctor muttered. "Gad, what a blow. . . . . Missed the jugular by a hair."

A slender slit in the skin, yes; but deep indeed, and the blood that flowed from it had drawn the bronze from Webster's face, the strength from the splendid muscles that lay relaxed now beneath clear skin. He refused anesthetic for the stitches, though, and clenched his teeth against the pain.

"Now!" said the physician when Ben lay back on Dawn's pillow, breathing shallowly, eyes closed. "I guess he'll be all right in a few days. . . . . But what an escape!"

Sweet looked at John Martin then. It was the first time he had given the man a close scrutiny and under the bright light his face was revealed in clear outline. The Doctor's brows drew a bit; he leaned forward and blinked.

"Yes, a close shave," Martin muttered. "But now—he's in the best place in the world."

The Doctor began gathering his instruments. Martin stood staring at Ben in deep thought. Then his right hand went to the lobe of his left ear and tugged slowly in that characteristic gesture. He did not observe Emma Coburn standing in the doorway. He did not look at her until the woman gasped. It was a light gasp, so light that Emory Sweet did not hear. But Martin heard and turned and stood as though frozen in the posture. Aunt Em's lips were open, head held rigidly back, one hand pressed against a cheek.

Quickly, Martin's finger went against his lips in a sealing gesture. He held so an instant, and then slowly shook his head, a warning movement.

Dawn entered the hallway from the living-room. Aunt Em bustled out into the kitchen and Martin smoothed the covers of the bed with a hand that trembled.

"Now, the boy's going to be all right," the Doctor said. "I'm leaving these tablets in case he gets restless. I've got to drive out south on a baby case. I'll look in tomorrow. Quiet is going to be essential for a few days. You two women all right?"

Aunt Em had returned to the room. A close observer might have noticed that her eyes were oddly averted from John Martin's searching gaze, and that her breathing was quick and shallow.

"Why, it might be handy to have a man in the house tonight," she said, evenly enough. "I'm—I'm wondering if Mr. Mar-

tin would stay. He could sleep on the couch in the living-room."

"I'd be glad to," the man said, and cleared his throat sharply. "There might be something I could do—for you."

He had looked at Dawn on this last, and it seemed that his voice caught.

He steadied himself, though, and eyed the old physician, who was repacking his bag.

"Doctor," Martin began, "this is a serious business. Whoever it is that's after the boy will stop at nothing. No one saw us bringing him here, I'm sure. I looked back several times to see if we were followed but could make out no one. In the storm, a body would have had to be pretty close to us to be sure that anything was out of the way, anyhow. I'm thinking we'd best keep his whereabouts quiet for the night. If only we here know, no one else will. If anyone else finds out—" He shrugged. "It's hard to keep a secret in Tincup!"

"Perhaps you're right," the doctor said grimly. He looked down at the pallid figure on the bed. "Guess he needs all the precautions that can be taken, now."

So it was arranged that Ben's whereabouts be kept a secret from the town and that Martin should stay with him through the night.

The doctor left and Aunt Em carried the lamp out of the sick-room and placed it on a table in the hall. She bustled here and there on many minor errands, and finally drove Dawn to bed despite protests of sleeplessness.

Alone, she fixed blankets on the living-room couch while Martin sat in the darkened bedroom. That done, she beckoned him from the hallway.

They confronted one another there a long moment. The woman's face worked queerly, and she seemed at a loss for words.

"What shall I say?" she asked in a whisper.

"Nothing," the man replied. "There is nothing to be said—is there?"

"Oh, you gave me such a start!"

"You're the first one. . . . . I'm—I'm too full of things to talk, now."

He made an odd gesture toward the walls and looked about.

"We're in the upstairs front room if we're needed," she said. "Is—is there anything you need yourself?"

He did not reply for a moment. Then, heavily:

"Yes—your help, likely. A little later—"

The woman did a strange thing then. She snatched up her apron and pressed it tightly against her eyes.

"She didn't remember!" she sobbed. "Oh, what'll happen in this house next?"

"I wonder," Martin muttered. "Yes—I wonder!"

She left him then, and he stepped into the living-room. He stood a long time just within the threshold and then went slowly about, from picture to table, from book-shelf to mantel, hands in his coat pockets. Before this old photograph he stood for long; beside that worn rocker he remained with bowed head, as one suffering —or worshiping. When he approached the couch where he was to sleep, his legs seemed to fail, and he slumped to his knees. He let his face down to the blankets, and his fingers clutched them, gripping until the knuckles showed white.

CHAPTER XXIV

GRIMLY, Bird-eye Blaine prowled Tincup that night.

He had let John Martin out as he drove through the main street, then proceeded to a livery barn, where he stabled his team.

On the way he had sighted Ben Webster; but later, although he took up a position before the post office and watched passers on either side of the street carefully, he did not again see Ben. He began making inquiries and found that Webster had been about town, but evidently he was always some little time behind.

Failing thus, he went to locate Ben's team and stood by it in the swirling snow, waiting. Stores closed. The aura of light which their frosted windows had thrown into the storm became fainter. Bird-eye chewed and stamped to keep warm, and watched and listened. And after a half-hour's vigil proved fruitless he moved away, along down the alley.

At the rear of Joe Piette's hotel he stopped and watched movement through a lighted rear window which gave into a back entry. A man was there, closing an inside stairway door stealthily behind him. He turned and buttoned his Mackinaw with hasty movements, and Blaine drew back into the shadows. Red Bart Delaney, that. . . . . The door opened; the man stepped out. He crossed between Bird-eye and the

lights, carrying snowshoes. He went swiftly down the alley, and then struck out past the depot toward the tracks.

"Well, now!" Blaine muttered to himself. "In such a rush!"

A chill which had nothing to do with the temperature of the night struck through him. Red Bart, fleeing town? Surely he went as a frightened man might go—or as one whose errand is completed.

Out into the street, then, went the Irishman, and into the pool-room.

"Dawn!" he called. "Hello—" A stinging blow smote his temple and he went down.

"Has annybody here seen Misther Webster?" he asked loudly, and men looked up from their games at the query. Yes, this man had, two hours ago; the butcher had talked to him about eight. None other. To the dance-hall, next, and his queries were repeated. Then hastily back to see Ben's team still standing, past Dawn McManus' house, to find only a faint light in the hallway, and from there to Abel Armitage's at a run.

Had the judge seen Ben Webster? He had not; and excitedly Blaine explained his search, the hasty departure of Red Bart, the patiently waiting team.

Abel dressed, and they went out together, searching the town, inquiring of late passers. Then past the McManus house again.

"Not there," Abel said. "They're a-bed. That hall light always burns."

"Something's happened!" Bird-eye declared. "Something's went wrong with th' b'y, Abel! We can't foind out what ut is ontil mornin'. . . . . Thin, belave me, we'll help a-plenty!"

"How so?"

"Lave ut to me, Abel!"

Through the night, ten minutes later, a team flew. They went out of town at a gallop; they breasted high drifts across the way in frantic plunges. They took cleared stretches of road at an urgent trot, and even before the camp cook was anywhere near ready to turn out for the new day, they came to a blowing stop at the Hoot Owl barn. A moment later Tim Jeffers sat up and in sleepy bewilderment fought off the man who shook him and demanded that he wake up and listen.

THE storm subsided before sunrise. The Sabbath came clear and cold to a world all immaculate in white and blue, strung here and there with green where swamp timber stood. A great, rolling country, and across it, from the direction of Hoot Owl toward Tincup, went teams. There were five of them in a sort of procession, drawing logging sleighs. Across the bunks planks had been placed, and on the planks stood and sat men; they were silent men, who drew on cold pipes, whose faces were set and grim, whose eyes betrayed excitement. The Hoot Owl crew, this, following Tim Jeffers and Bird-eye Blaine to Tincup to solve a mystery.

In an orderly manner they left the sleighs and stood in groups while teamsters unhitched and led their horses into a livery barn. Townspeople tried to mingle, curious at this assemblage, but they were not encouraged and drew apart, standing not far off to watch and wonder.

Abel Armitage came hurrying, and he alone was welcome in that phalanx of grim men. Others of the town saw him gesticulate, saw him shake his head and spread his hands, as one will who has no answer for a pressing problem as he talked with Jeffers and Blaine.

Old Tim turned to the crews and motioned them in. The men gathered close and listened while he spoke briefly. Then the compact huddle broke; Jeffers emerged and started for the main street, that body of shanty boys falling in to move shoulder to shoulder behind him. A strange sight, for that peaceful Sunday morning!

Into the main street they swung, old Tim wallowing in the long drift at the corner, his men trampling it down behind him. On down past Abel's office past the pool-room, and then without a word of signal they halted. The halt was before the bank, over which Nicholas Brandon had his offices and his living-rooms.

Queer, that silence as they stood, every one of the hundred faces uplifted to those windows with the lettering which proclaimed the tenant. And then Tim lifted his clear, strong voice.

"Brandon!" he shouted. "Nick Brandon!"

The breath vapor of his men rose in a cloud. No other spoke. Far down the street a small boy yipped excitedly; across the way townsmen were muttering to one another, flinging quick, excited questions, disclaiming knowledge for fitting responses.

"Brandon!" Tim shouted again, and his men stirred behind him, swayed, giving up a low, short mutter.

"Come out, Nick!" a teamster shouted, voice thick with repressed excitement. "Ay, come out!" another cried.

MOVEMENT, then, where they had expected movement. Up above, a face appeared in a window. Nicholas Brandon, collar and tie in his hands ready to put on, called from his dressing by his shouted name, looked down upon them. He had stepped into the early sunlight which streamed into his office, and for the instant the glare blinded him. He scowled against it, lifted a hand to shield his eyes, and they could see his lips compress as he discerned that crowd.

"Come down, Brandon!"

This was Tim again, his voice edged with sharpness, as he might speak to a rebellious man of his crew.

Brandon moved and threw up the sash.

"What do you men want?" he demanded sharply, in the tone of one who has been long accustomed to make demands.

"We want Ben Webster!" Jeffers answered.

"Webster? He isn't here. . . . . What would he be doing here? What do I know of him?"

A mumbling, a stirring behind Tim.

"We can't locate him. We want him. We want you to help us find him!"

("You're damn' right!" "Tell us, you skunk!" "Show him to us, or we'll wreck your town!")

Tim held up a silencing hand against this outbreak. Then he addressed Brandon.

"Webster came to town last night. He hasn't been seen since. His team's tied and waiting for him. There's only one man in town who'd have an object in getting him out of the way. We've come to that man: to you, Brandon. We want Webster!"

Brandon's lips writhed.

"I tell you, I know nothing about—" He slammed down the sash and cut off the rest of his sentence.

He turned his back deliberately to the window. He took three slow steps away from the front of the building, and those paces put him out of view from the street below. Then in a frantic lunge he reached the telephone.

"Give me the jail!" he said excitedly. "Quick! The jail!"

Outside, a growing, mounting roar sounded; next quick silence as Tim Jeffers sought to husband their purpose.

"Smash in the door; it's locked!"

"Take him until he gives Ben up!"

"Good *boy!*"

The ball of ice accumulated on some horse's hoof, now picked up and flung stoutly, crashed through an office window.

Brandon cowered as a yell of approval went up, and pressed his face close to the telephone.

"Hickens? Art! This is Brandon! There's a mob out here and—"

"I've seen it!" The Sheriff's voice trembled. "I saw 'em come in. I—"

"Get down here, then, and be quick about it! Get down here and scatter them!"

Brandon waited for the ready acquiescence which always had come from the men he had made, from officers of the law and judges and public officials, both high and low.

"Are you there?" he demanded sharply as a shrill yip came from the street.

"Yes, Mr. Brandon. But—but what can I do alone? I—"

"Alone! You're Sheriff, you fool! You've the law behind you! Bring a gun and hurry!"

"But that crowd, Nick! Why, they're the best men in the North! They'd tear me to ribbons!"

"Can't you understand you're *Sheriff?*"

"Sheriff, hell! They're good men and they're mad. You better get out the back if you can!"

With an oath Brandon flung the receiver from him as another window exploded to fragments. Abandoned to that muttering mob, and by the man whose political career he had shaped with his own hands! From a safe vantage-point he looked out. A half-dozen men were pulling at a sign-post. The street was filling with people—his people, his employees. They were wide-eyed, excited, and he saw a dozen of them, men who had whined and groveled before him, laugh and jeer as another missile spattered on the bricks outside.

HE ran down the hallway and looked out the rear. A grim guard stood there, waiting. Into his sleeping chamber, then, and took down a rifle from its rack on a pair of antlers. He threw open the chamber, but it was empty. He jerked open a dresser drawer and pawed through it in a fruitless search for cartridges, cursing because he found none. His breath was ragged as he threw the rifle on the bed and rumpled his hair wildly.

"Bring Webster out!" "Show us Ben!" "Get a rail!" These and other terrifying cries stood out above the constant mutter of the mob.

Brandon rushed to the front office and waved his arms as he stood in the shattered glass of his window, but the sight of him only provoked hoots and jeers and a great billow of savage, snarling rage.

The men were having trouble with the sign-post. Some one had brought an ax and was chopping into the frozen earth about its base. He heard the stair door tried, and a voice called: "Hustle with that post!"

They were coming in to get him!

He could not satisfy them. He did not know where Webster was. Last night Delaney had promised to try again, but he had not come to report, though Brandon had waited late. . . . . And now the crowd was howling for Webster; lacking Webster, they would take him.

He covered his face with his hands, tried to stop his ears. In those menacing, mocking cries he heard the knell of his reign. Like Canute who had defied the ocean tides, he had tried to stem this wave of accumulated bitterness. For years he had ruled by the force of his will, and now that force was not enough. Bit by bit Ben Webster had caught the fancy of the country, and now, with that group of stout men as a rallying point, the entire town was setting up a demand for the missing Webster. They wanted Ben Webster. They would have Ben Webster.

"Go home!" he screamed and waved his arms, standing close to a broken window. "Clear out, you! Fair warning, I'm giving!"

But his words were drowned in a great yell. Men came lugging that post across the street while Tim Jeffers hastened toward them with gestures of protest. In a lull the camp foreman's voice could be heard:

"Hold your heads, now! Give us Hoot Owl boys a chance. We'll get what we come for or we'll take Tincup apart. But no destroyin' of property until everything else fails!"

His will prevailed a moment. He lifted his face to Brandon.

"We mean business! Will you come out and show us Ben, or must we come and get you?"

"Coming!" Brandon croaked. "I'm coming!" It was a chance to delay!

A gratified sound went up from the crowd and burst into shrill words.

Coming? Like the devil, he would go! He was ransacking drawers, now, dumping them on the floor in his frantic search for the cartridges that should be there. The noise outside increased; more people were coming. It seemed as if the whole town must be there.

He sought a key for a locked trunk and could not find it. He tried several, but his hands shook so that he might have failed to make the proper one operate.

Again Jeffers' voice, demanding him out of a strange, strained silence.

"Coming!" he shouted thickly, and seized a hammer and attacked the trunk lock. Ammunition *must* be in there. . . . .

The crowd milled, now, trampling the new snow, completely out of hand at this delay. Two or three aided Tim in his plea for at least temporary moderation, but others rebelled and fought to get the post which would batter down the stair door. These weaved to and fro there in the packed throng, a quarrel within a quarrel.

And then came a hush, a quick, spreading hush which swept the crowd like a shadow; like a swiftly speeding shadow, wiping out sound as a shadow wipes out sunlight, breaking sentences in half. And then rose a quick popping of excited voices.

"Webster!" "Here he is!" "Look!" "He's hurt!"

Bundled to the ears in a great overcoat, cap drawn low, supported on the one side by John Martin and on the other by Abel Armitage, he came slowly, painfully out of the side-street. His head rocked from weakness, and his progress was halting, hesitant. He scarcely seemed to be aware of that throng; all his energy was bent on moving forward.

Those nearest him fell back a bit, staring speechlessly at this ghost of the strong man they had seen yesterday. He gained the middle of the street in an impressive hush. Then he murmured a word to Abel and they halted.

BEN looked about at his men and smiled a bit, weakly, but in his look was clearly indicated that love which strong men have for strong men.

"It's all right, boys," he said, and only those in the first ranks could hear, his voice was that light. "They didn't get me badly. I appreciate this—but want you to —get back to—camp."

He panted for breath and lifted his face to the broken windows above. Far back in that room he caught a glimpse of a face watching him, cocked as through striving to hear.

"It's my fight," he went on. "Not yours. I don't want any of you hurt. Go back. Will you go back?"

The crowd stirred.

"You bet we will, Ben!" a man called. "If you ask it, we will!"

Tim Jeffers worked his way to Ben's side and put a hand on his shoulder.

"Go home, boys!" he called. "They knifed Ben last night, but he's well took care of. You teamsters, get out your horses; we've found what we come for. To camp, every last Hoot Owl man!"

Men relaxed. The post that was to have battered in Brandon's doors was dropped. The mob's spirit was satiated.

Slowly Ben Webster made his way back to Dawn's home.

As Tim Jeffers took his place beside the sick man, Abel Armitage drew into the post-office entry to watch the mob disperse. Emory Sweet was standing there.

"The king is dead!" Abel muttered, staring at those broken windows.

"Long live the king!" said Emory.

"Dead men tell no tales."

"No, but sometimes a corpse will kick back!"

YES, the shell of a king whose power is gone *can* kick back!

Furiously, Nicholas Brandon saw as the days passed the wreckage of his power pile up on a flood of public resentment, of loosened expressions of distrust and contempt and hatred.

The man who had replaced the glass in his office windows that Sunday afternoon worked slowly and silently where, in other days, he had done odd jobs with swift efforts that his labor might give his employer pleasure, and had taken every opportunity to make talk with the town's great man.

On Monday as Brandon walked along the street he saw faces leering at him from windows, and men he passed averted their eyes in a gleeful sort of embarrassment or looked at him with surly, defiant glances.

In yard and mill he was conscious that his employees were thinking only of his fall. He discharged one man for loafing, and the fellow only laughed at him!

"There's room at Hoot Owl for good hands," he said, and laughed again.

Ah, that mob yesterday had not wrecked the town as they had threatened, but the ruin they left was of far more consequence. Their coming had stripped Brandon of everything but his material possessions!

Back in the office, he locked the door against the intrusion of clerks who worked —and probably smirked—in adjacent rooms, and paced the place like a caged animal.

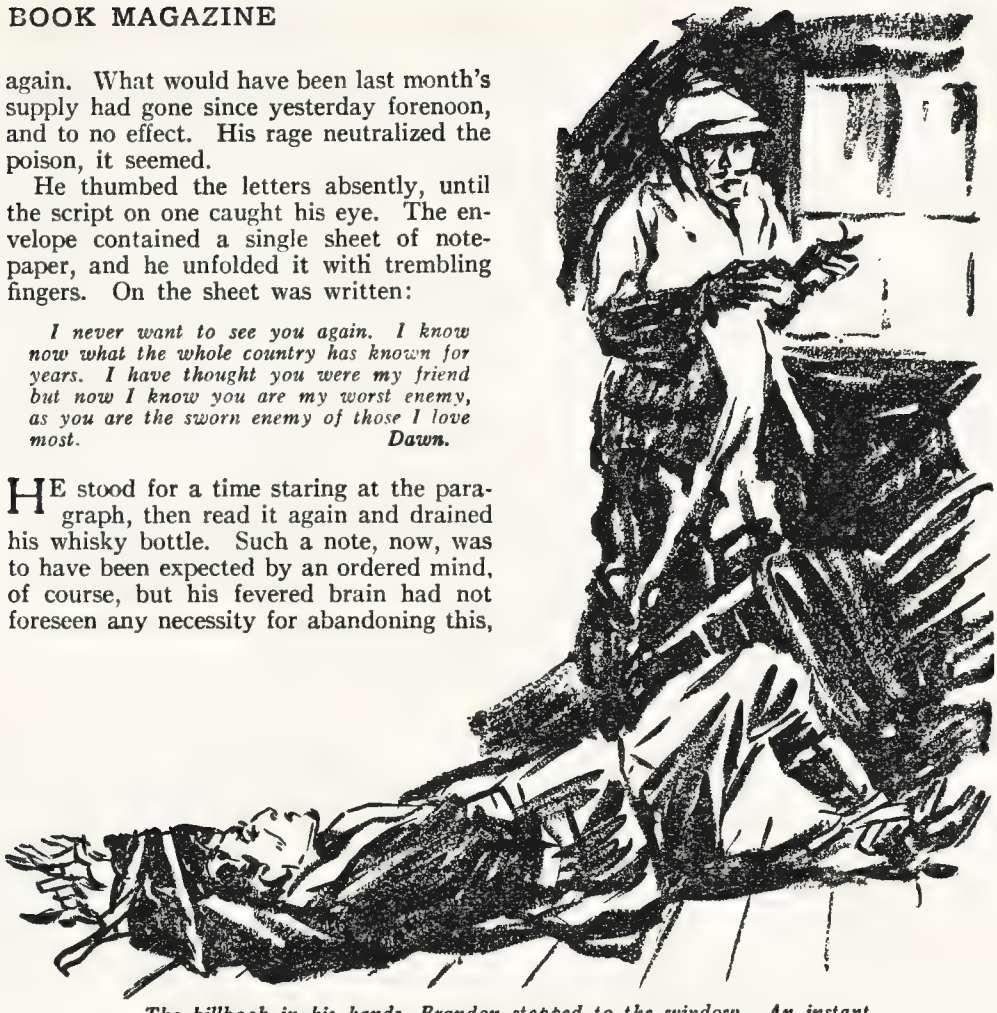
Mail arrived. He took the packet of letters and drank deeply from his bottle

again. What would have been last month's supply had gone since yesterday forenoon, and to no effect. His rage neutralized the poison, it seemed.

He thumbed the letters absently, until the script on one caught his eye. The envelope contained a single sheet of notepaper, and he unfolded it with trembling fingers. On the sheet was written:

I never want to see you again. I know now what the whole country has known for years. I have thought you were my friend but now I know you are my worst enemy, as you are the sworn enemy of those I love most. ***Dawn.***

HE stood for a time staring at the paragraph, then read it again and drained his whisky bottle. Such a note, now, was to have been expected by an ordered mind, of course, but his fevered brain had not foreseen any necessity for abandoning this,



The billbook in his hands, Brandon stepped to the window. An instant of silence. Then: "Where's that letter?"

the most precious of his hopes. He trembled a bit and made a strange sound in his throat.

A meticulous office man was Nicholas Brandon, and though he had suffered the severest blow of his experience just now, he mechanically went about his habitual procedure. He had received and read a letter. It required no reply. The next step in orderly routine was to file it.

Now, in the outer office were ranks and rows of letter files. But this letter did not belong there. In the great safe to which only he had combination and keys, reposed two files side by side. He took both out now, and placed them on his desk. He opened one, and a cruel smile twitched his lips. It contained letters on paper of varying size, color and quality. He riffled through them; the names of scattered towns were above the written dates, but all had been set down by the same hand He stopped now and again and read a phrase, a sentence, a paragraph. Pleas, these were, a writer begging for help. And Brandon smiled again. . . . .

In the other file were more letters, some yellowed by age, and these older ones had been written in the unformed script of a child: *"Dear Uncle Nick,"* they all began. Always that, though the handwriting grew formed and mature until it was identical with that on the single sheet he had just read. These were Dawn McManus' letters to him, saved since her childhood.

He ran through them almost idly, his senses dulled by whisky and the calamity which had befallen him. . . . . A letter from boarding-school, one telling him that she would be home for Christmas; a third inscribed while visiting at the home of a

school friend. . . . . A narrow slip of tablet paper fell out. He looked at the penciled note on one side:

Meet us at Antler Lodge this afternoon. Dawn.

Happier memories that inspired, of the time Dawn had brought girls home with her for Thanksgiving and had taken them to the hunting-camp for a week-end. Brandon had gone with the party, and it was there that he had first remarked Dawn's womanhood; that the desire for her had first been kindled; there in the camp where her father, as the whole country knew, had been with Sam Faxson on the night when Faxson fled to his death. But Dawn had never known that. She had laughed and been happy at Antler Lodge.

He read it again. No date—unsoiled—bearing no indication of the time that had passed. It had been left on his desk for him three years before. . . . . He leaned forward sharply, and his eyes narrowed.

CHAPTER XXV

FINE strength of body healed Ben Webster's wound rapidly. By mid-week he was dressed and sitting up. By Friday his face showed color, and late that afternoon he sat before the fire with Dawn, talking of his return to Hoot Owl on the morrow.

"It's been so good, here with you," he said gravely.

The girl flushed but made no reply.

"And all the time I've been wondering, Dawn, why you wouldn't let me come. You've been so kind, so generous, so—so friendly. And yet, only a few days ago, you told me I must never come again."

She showed uneasiness and pain, now.

"Why was it, Dawn? Why, when I love you so?"

"Don't!" she begged. "Please!"

"Why not? Can't you explain?"

She was fighting for self-control, now, and wrested her hands from his, backing away, white and shaken.

"You can't understand, perhaps. Sometimes I can't myself. Always I've wanted to be loved—by you, Ben Webster! It's given me the only true happiness I've ever had. I've seen it coming all these weeks, and at first I could scarcely wait to be certain of myself and to have you certain.

"And then I had to remember what I am. Can't you see?"—voice breaking as she lifted a hand in a pitiful little gesture of appeal. "Can't you see that a girl who is known as the daughter of a murderer can't let any man love her?"

Webster took her in his arms then, forcibly, crying her name.

"That's foolish! It's terrible, I know, for you to bear. But let me help; let me stand by your side and help!"

"No, no! I can't bear it! I couldn't take a cloud to you and to your children. . . . . And it's all a mistake, all a lie! My father was kind and gentle; he never would hurt another. All these years I've known it and others know it, but it doesn't help. Something tells me that he is alive somewhere, waiting, watching, suffering. . . . . But until something comes up to banish this cloud. . . . . No, don't kiss me again! I can't *stand* it!"

Sobbing, she fled the room.

"WELL, that ought not to be impossible!" Webster said to himself after a long, thoughtful interval. "Nothing much is."

He made no further moves toward love-making, but far into the night he talked with Dawn of her father. She had not heard all of the story, he realized. She did not know, for instance, that the tragedy took place in Antler Lodge; she did not know how far her father had gone in his attempts to drown the sorrow of his wife's death by drinking. But she did know that Faxson was dead, that her father was blamed, and that a dusty warrant for him still reposed in the county records.

As he lay sleepless he told himself that he must dig into this old mystery and try to absolve McManus of blame. A difficult task, yes, with all this lapsed time in the way, but nothing much in life mattered now, except the winning of this fine girl.

Abel dropped in the next forenoon, and Ben questioned and pried into the old story. At noon he declared that he felt fit to drive back to camp, and for an hour argued with Dawn, trying to win her promise that he might come again, but she begged him to stay away for a time, at least.

Webster did not go at once to the stable where his team awaited him. He entered the courthouse and went over the meager records of the Faxson case, but little that was new rewarded his search. The net yield of that time was only to impress him with the proportions of the task he had set for himself, and as he drove out of town

his heart was heavier than it had been in years.

Putting the Hoot Owl on its feet had been a lark; shearing Brandon of his power had been hazardous, but after all, simple. The tough nut had been good fun to crack. But this other—

Suddenly he thought of Don Stuart's letter, and his heart thumped. Stuart had been the only important witness at the inquest. But something heavy had been on the old man's mind as he lay dying, a burden had been on his soul which he did not want to carry to the grave. Could it have had to do with this old mystery? The possibility thrilled the puzzled young man.

Ben unbuttoned his Mackinaw, and the cold wind searched his weakened body. He drew out his billbook, took the letter from it and buttoned his coat against the cold.

His heart beat fast as he scanned the inscription on the face of that envelope, now faint and smudged. *"Open this when the nut gets too hard to crack,"* old Don had written. Fair warning, that; more, if he opened that letter now, he would be going against lifelong precedent, all his habitual procedure. What Don Stuart had left him was an unknown quantity; it might be much, it might be little. But, he told himself grimly, he would not even try to find out until he had exhausted all his own resources!

The horses broke into a trot when he reached this decision. The wind cut through his clothing, and he shivered. Rather than replace the letter in his billfold, which would necessitate a moment of great chill, he tucked it through a rip in the lining of his gauntlet glove. A good hiding-place, he told himself.

THAT night Bird-Eye Blaine sat with Webster for long and went over the circumstances leading up to Faxson's death; and the next day Ben drained Tim Jeffers of what he knew. Abel came out from town early in the week, and Ben would not talk of the logging operation because his whole interest was centered on the task of proving McManus blameless.

"I've always thought he was, myself," Abel agreed. "But it's a tough nut, Ben! So long ago and all."

"Murder will out," Ben reminded him, but the old Justice only shrugged.

Men in Tincup commenced to whisper that Webster was delving into the McManus case and the gossip reached Brandon, who was locked in his office most of the time now, soaked with whisky. He paced the floor for hours after that, apprehensive when he heard footsteps on the stairway. He did not drink after the news reached him. He kept his head clear and planned. He planned, lastly, with a saw-salesman he felt he could trust, a man who had always whined and cringed before Nicholas Brandon and who did not yet realize that the man's power was gone.

CHAPTER XXVI

ABEL told Dawn of Ben's activity, watching her face narrowly because he understood the obstacle that was between these two. He saw hope come, followed by misgiving and trouble.

It was on Friday that Dawn left Tincup, putting on her snowshoes at the edge of town and striking across country far from the road toward Hoot Owl.

She was going to see Ben Webster, the man she had told not to see her again, and tell him that she *must* see him now, that her heart could have no peace without him, that he must come to her and let her stand beside him while he pried into the past and attempted to make it give up truth.

Martin was alone in the office when she entered, and started up so sharply at sight of her that the girl in turn was startled.

"I'm sorry!" she exclaimed, a bit mystified. "Did I frighten you?"

The man's face was a study in conflicting emotions. For a moment he did not speak. Then he laughed oddly.

"No, not frightened. . . . . My thoughts were far from here."

"Is Ben about?"

"Haven't seen him since dinner." His eyes held on her face hungrily and yet the look was not annoying. "He was talking to a saw-salesman after he came in. Don't know where he went."

Tim Jeffers, just down from camp, entered then. He bobbed his head at Dawn and removed his cap.

"Where's Ben at?" he asked Martin.

"I don't know. Miss McManus, here, was just asking."

"Buller said he saw him hittin' off south a bit ago. Wonder when he'll be back."

Martin moved to the old table Ben used for a desk.

"Haven't an idea. I was at the mill.

Sometimes he leaves a note for me when he's going away." He bent over the table, looking at the litter of papers on it. "No, he left no word. H'm—what's this?"

He picked up a slip of paper, read the single line inscribed on it and looked at Dawn.

"I didn't mean to pry. Probably he's gone to meet you, though."

"Me?" Puzzled, the girl moved close.

"Yes. This is a note from you."

"A note! Why, I—" Frowning, she took the paper and read:

Meet us at Antler Lodge this afternoon. Dawn.

"Why!" she cried. "I didn't. . . . . But I *must* have!"—looking in bewilderment from one to the other. "That's my writing. . . . . *Oh!*" Aghast, she let the paper flutter to the floor, and the hand that had held it went to her cheek in a gesture of panic.

"I wrote that! I wrote that years ago!" she cried, struggling to speak distinctly. "I wrote that note to Mr. Brandon years ago. . . . . How did it get here? Calling Ben to the lodge!"

"What's this?" Tim Jeffers asked roughly; "Brandon callin' Ben off alone?"

He retrieved the paper, and the three read it again.

"Don't you see?" Martin cried, and his voice was thick. "Dawn wrote it, all right. But Brandon's sent it to Ben. . . . . It's a decoy! Tim, the lad's on his way to the lodge alone; and Brandon—"

No need for more words then! On went Martin's jacket. From a corner he snatched snowshoes and a pair for Tim.

"We'll go," he said to Dawn. "You tell Buller—"

"But I'm going too!" the girl cried sharply. "I'm going. Oh, hurry, Tim! We may be too late, now!"

THEY crossed the railroad tracks at a run, put on their snowshoes, and with Jeffers, sturdy traveler, breaking trail, entered the timber. It was easy going there, because another had gone that way today, a man who traveled with a long, swinging stride despite the subnormal strength of his body, for his heart sang. Dawn had sent for him; Dawn wanted him!

Entering the office while Martin was in the mill, his eyes had encountered Dawn's note. No thought of how it came to be there presented itself. The quick conclusion at which he arrived was that Dawn and others had gone to Antler Lodge; that was where the shot had been fired which sent Sam Faxson to his death. He had planned to visit the place himself and attempt to reconstruct the tragic happening of so long ago. Perhaps Abel had taken Dawn there. . . . . Hastily he took his snowshoes and departed.

His endurance and vigor were not entirely regained, but he found that he could walk well enough. He had never been to the hunting camp, but he knew the country well enough to be certain of reaching there without delay.

It was a good five miles away, however, and part of the going was in soft snow. A wind blew in his face and snow had commenced to fall. So it was well into the second hour after his start that he came in sight of the building on the high bank of the Mad Cat.

No smoke rose from the chimney but as he went down the slope he saw snowshoe tracks outside the place.

"Hello!" he cried, mounting a drift and stopping. "Hello, in there!"

No answer. He twisted his feet hastily out of their straps, wondering a bit. For once his alertness was gone, for once he was wholly off guard. He sank to his knees in the drift as he stepped off his snowshoes.

"Dawn!" he called again as he shoved open the door. "Hello, who's here—"

He had crossed the threshold, peering into the gloom of the small-windowed room, a sudden and cold misgiving sweeping him. "Turn back—withdraw!" a small voice warned but before he could gather himself a weight struck him from the side, a stinging blow smote his temple, a body crushed upon him and he went down under a heavy, living weight!

But as Webster went down, with the man on top, he drew his knees upward, bowed his back and with a trick of rough-and-tumble fighting used the very impact which had floored him to toss his assailant on beyond.

He heard the man curse, saw him turn as he pitched across the floor and scramble to his feet.

"Brandon!" he cried hoarsely.

Tricked! Brought here by a ruse, but at last he was face to face with the man who had struck so many times from the darkness and from behind!

Brandon did not speak. He rushed. Great arms wrapped Ben's body, a head

drove into the pit of his stomach. He was lifted from his feet, swept backward against the wall with a heavy crash that drove the breath from his body.

He fell to the floor fighting, but his blows were weak, ineffective. A hand clutched at his throat and he tore at it with all his strength. He felt the wound in his shoulder open under the strain, a burning, stinging sensation. The fingers

Brandon held the bark over the match. "Here goes a fool!" he cackled

shut down on his windpipe and he writhed under that agony, summoning all his courage, all his will to break free, to outlast that strangling pressure. But he could not. A humming set up in his ears, growing to a roar Lights danced before his eyes. He went numb; his brain clouded. He lay still— and then air poured into his lungs.

That was all of which he was aware for a long interval—air, bathing his tortured chest. Air, which had been denied him by the grip of a man's hand.

That thought burned away the haze which enveloped him, and he started to throw himself over, to rise, to be up and fighting. . . . . And could not!

His hands were stretched out above his head, a harsh, cruel bond held each wrist. He tried to kick and could not. His feet were locked together and held there as by a great weight.

A distinct odor pervaded the room: kerosene. . . . . Kerosene? He scowled and groaned.

Footsteps, then, came across the floor, and Nicholas Brandon looked down at him in the dim light, whisky bottle in his hand, swaying a bit.

"So!" he grunted and laughed. He had been about to drink again when he began to laugh, but his mirth was so great that he did not. It was a terrible laugh, the laugh of a madman at some scene of fiendish humor.

"So!" he cried again. "So you fell for it! So you followed your blessed Dawn, eh?" He went off into another tantrum of that crazy laughter.

Ben studied the man's face, trying to be calm. He twisted against his bonds and discovered that the rope which bound him was wet. He could no more free himself without aid than he could hope to fly!

"It worked!" Brandon cried. "God, how it worked! 'Dawn!' you yelled, standing outside there. 'Dawn!' And then stepped into my trap, eh?"

He sat heavily in a chair.

"It's all worked, even to the weather! You came alone. It's starting to snow. Nobody's nearer than the Hoot Owl, and the smoke of a burning camp wouldn't be seen twenty rods a day like this!"

SMOKE of a burning camp! That odor of kerosene! Ben's fingers felt the strands of hemp that stretched from his wrists to the posts of bunks against the wall. Surely, the rope had been soaked in oil! For a moment his heart faltered. So

that was Brandon's plan, to leave him tied helpless, to fire the building. . . . . Then his pulse leaped on, stronger than ever as his entire consciousness centered on thwarting the scheme of this ruthless man gone mad.

"Yeah. It worked—so far," he replied and grinned.

At that Brandon snorted in contempt.

"So far, yes; and on to the end, it'll work! Oh, I'm no fool. I could've shot you down as you stood on the drift outside, but would I? Not much! I leave no evidence. You're not hurt. There's not a mark on you but a bruise or two. I saw to that.

"But you're tied fast, aren't you?"—leaning low, so Ben could see the cruel lights in his eyes even in the gloom. "You're tied hand and foot. I'll touch the camp off. You'll roast—a little at a time, because this old camp'll burn like hell itself! It'll burn the ropes slick and clean, but not until after you're past crawling out. They'll find your bones here; they'll find an empty whisky bottle. That's *all* they'll find!"

The enormity of it! Why, the plan for finishing him was like some terrible nightmare. Brandon had schemed competently; no detail seemed to have been overlooked. But no fear manifested itself in Webster's heart; only contempt was there for a man so merciless—contempt and a stout determination to stall for time.

"Yeah, good idea, Brandon," he said and grinned again. "A peach! Wouldn't've given you credit for so much imagination. Got your alibi all fixed, too, I'll bet!"

"And you win, Webster! There isn't a jot they could tie on me—not a shadow of suspicion. Why, the railroad folks would swear that I got off a train in Milwaukee this morning."

He drank again and rose, putting the bottle down on the chair.

"Where's your billbook?" he demanded.

BILLBOOK! So Brandon wanted one thing even more than he wanted the life of that bound man. A wave of triumph swept Ben. Old Don's letter was not in the billbook. It was safe in the torn lining of his driving glove, lying yonder on the floor where it had been flung in the scuffle.

"Going to pick my pocket first?" he taunted. "Down to lifting pokes, Brandon?"

The other did not reply. His fingers slipped into one of Webster's pockets, jerking it inside out. A knife and some change rattled on the floor. Another pocket yielded nothing he sought. He drove a toe beneath Webster's hip, lifting his body.

"Ah! So here—"

With the billbook in his hands, he stepped to the window, opening it, holding it to the light. An instant of silence. Then:

"Where's that letter?"

Ben laughed. It was an honest laugh, free and easy and brave.

"So Limpy told you where I put it, eh? Well, well! And he lied like a trooper to me for you. And wouldn't it have been tough if I *had* left it in the book and Delaney *had* gotten me and somebody else had found the letter!"

Brandon flung the billbook away and advanced menacingly.

"Hold your tongue!" he snarled, and dropped to his knees. He went through every pocket, he jerked Ben's shirt open and searched for a money belt, he cursed sharply.

"Where's that letter?" he demanded.

"Think I'd have it on me after all that's almost happened? You may polish me off, but that letter will live!"

The other got to his feet, and his breathing was audible.

"It's a lie! Whatever he wrote is a lie! He was a drunken, lying bum! It's a lie, all he said!"

His teeth clicked in rage and dismay, now.

"The trouble is, Brandon, that the rest of us don't think so," Ben prodded. "What he had to say seems to tie in with what is known and what we've guessed."

"You're wrong!" the man said, his voice mounting to a sudden scream. "He told the truth at the inquest! He—" He broke short and wiped his mouth with one hand. "What'd he say, Webster, that makes you suspect me?"

Ben's heart leaped. *That* was it: *suspicion* was the thing that Nicholas Brandon feared! His very manner, more than his words, was evidence of it, and so the man on the floor, stretched out and helpless, laughed softly.

"It's as simple as daylight, Nick. McManus was no killer. His disappearance made it look bad for him, of course, but we know that *McManus did not shoot Faxson!*"

Brandon swayed forward and then stopped, standing spread-legged, weaving to and fro, swinging clenched fists.

"A lie, a lie!" he screamed in a wild frenzy of insane fright. "It's a lie! I wasn't here! I wasn't near the place! . . . . Ah!" He stopped with a grunt. "So you *did* read the letter, eh? You said you wouldn't, but you did!"

Thrill after thrill of achievement, of inspiration raced through Ben's outstretched body because the other, driven mad by failure and misgivings, was teetering far over the brink of self-betrayal!

"My affair, wasn't it?" he challenged, following the course he thought best to stir the man's frenzy. "You had Delaney knife me, didn't you? And I'd threatened to open the letter unless you came into the open. . . . . Well, old Don had a tale to tell for sure and—"

"He lied to spite me! He wasn't here. He took Faxson's word for it, and Faxson didn't know. He was asleep in that room right there,"—pointing,—"and he came out while we were talking, and Mac went wild and shot him and—"

Webster could not repress his shout of triumphant laughter.

"While *we* were talking! . . . . And you've sworn and people have thought you weren't here that night. Why—"

"I misspoke, you fool! While McManus was here alone!" His voice shook, as though a sharp chill penetrated to his bones. "Faxson told Stuart and Stuart told it at the inquest. I wasn't near the place, Webster; I hadn't seen them for days!"

Again Ben laughed, a forced laugh, this time because his first had shaken Brandon, stripped him of his decisiveness. He could not withstand laughter!

"You give yourself away, Nick. It all ties in with what Stuart said."

"Fool! You're all fools! It's his word against mine, the word of a drunken bum against Nicholas Brandon's! Who's going to believe it?"

YONDER lay the glove concealing Don's letter, and in Ben's mind conviction swelled. . . . . Ah, this panting, driveling man had betrayed his dark secret, had given away his great fear. In the lining of that glove rested evidence that surely would solve this musty mystery, that would clear the cloud from Dawn's life. He must continue to battle for time, now. He had a madman to deal with; he must think quickly, carefully and bring all his inventiveness to bear.

And back to the northward three people came through the darkening forest on his trail, bending low to the growing storm; two men ahead, beating down a track for the girl who followed, silent and white-faced, speaking now and then to urge greater speed.

BEN spoke:

"I've a proposition, Brandon. How'd you like to trade? I'm not much stuck on the idea of roasting like a barbecued ox. How'd you like to have Stuart's letter for, say, the use of my hands and feet?"

Brandon came close and leaned over him. The light was so faint that Ben could scarcely make out the man's features.

"Mean that? You mean you'd give it up if I set you loose? And that you'd hold your tongue and never mention it? Mean that, Webster?"

His voice had steadied. It had some measure of its old calmness. He no longer seemed the madman. He had asked a simple question, a fair question and to such a question Webster could make none but a simple, fair reply.

So Ben shook his head grimly.

"No, Brandon. I wouldn't hold my tongue for all you have to give. . . . . Not even to be out of this jam!"

The man recoiled, screaming a curse.

"So you want to roast, eh? I don't give a damn for that letter! It's the word of an old bum. And you're going out, as Faxson went out!"

"And McManus?"

"McManus didn't go— McManus didn't die *this* way."

But on the correction Ben detected something suspicious. It was as if one part of Brandon's mind were clinging to fact, traveling its natural course. He had started to say that McManus did not go . . . . somewhere, some way. . . . .

"But McManus didn't die at all, Nick," he said lowly. He heard a sobbing breath catch in the other's throat. "They all thought he drowned himself. But he didn't. Yeah, he's alive. Didn't you know that? And coming back to face it out!"

"He doesn't dare come back! A warrant's waiting for him. . . . . The fool! He's admitted the killing! I've got it in writing—in writing—writing." He gibbered, now. "He doesn't dare show him-

self—with a warrant waiting. And you'd help him—you'd help the fool to try to make a case—a case for himself—"

HE went unsteadily toward the woodpile beside the hearth. He muttered to himself thickly as he pawed over the logs. Then he stripped birchbark from one.

"They'll find your bones," he growled between teeth which rattled in spasmodic chatters. "They'll find you—after while—your bones—"

From beneath the sink he dragged an oil can. Along the walls he sloshed its contents. Over the floor he let it dribble, across to Ben's body, soaking his coat, his arms with kerosene.

"One chance!" he cried. "One—that letter, Webster. For that letter I'll let you go!"

It looked bad. There seemed to be no way out, and a great flare of rage swept Ben's heart. Death leered at him out of the shadows and he tugged at his bonds until the skin of his wrists broke and peeled beneath the wet rope.

"Your one chance. You'll roast—"

"I'll not trade with you, Brandon!" Ben cried savagely. "To hell with you!"

The man struck a match. In his hand he held a curl of birchbark.

"Here goes a fool, then!" he cackled.

He held the bark over the match. The flame caught. The flare lit the man's face, set in an expression of fiendishness that beggared words. He took one step to a pile of oil-drenched débris against the oil-soaked wall. He bent forward to apply his torch—then stopped, hand extended.

A SHOUT outside, a body crashing against the door; it burst open and Tim Jeffers plunged into the room. Behind him came Martin, and as Dawn slid down the steep drift the burning curl of tinder dropped to the floor and Brandon whirled.

"Get him, Tim!" cried Ben. "Nail him! Don't give him a chance!"

With a muffled shout Martin and Jeffers flung themselves on Brandon as he charged for the doorway to another room. He screamed. He fought frantically, but they bore him down.

"Take that!" Tim's voice bellowed. "An' that! An' that!" The sound of knuckles on flesh came with the words. . . . . Curses, inarticulate shouts, and then Dawn's frantic voice:

"Ben, where are you?"

The struggling ceased suddenly, with a long, gagging sound from Brandon.

"Hold him so, Martin," Tim panted. "Keep your knee in his back an' your hold on his wrist. He can't move. . . . . Now, Benny?"

He rose, looked around the room and moved to where Webster's prone figure showed indistinctly in the gloom.

"Well, I'll be damned!" he said. "Get up. What? What's this?"

"Trussed up, Tim. Cut me loose. . . . . Hurry! This is going to be a great party!"

A knife-blade clicked open; the oil-soaked ropes parted. Ben lurched to his feet.

Dawn, running into the kitchen of the camp she knew so well, came back with a lamp, its reservoir half filled. The wick was lighted, and the shadows of the dark room drew back. They looked down at Brandon, held prisoner by Martin, and then at one another.

"We seen the note," Jeffers muttered. "Dawn, there, would come out. We suspected you were in trouble and—"

"Never mind about me now," Ben broke in.

"But you're all that matters!" Dawn said. "Ben. . . . . It was my note that decoyed you. It was an old one, written to him. He'd saved it."

She went quickly toward him and placed both hands on his shoulders, looking up into his face with an expression of great distress.

Webster smiled and covered her hands with his.

"Never mind anything that has to do with me. I'm only an accident in this. It's going to be a wonderful day, Dawn. This part is tough for you, but—" He gave his head an emphatic twist, smiled at her in assurance, then, putting her gently aside stepped close to Martin's side.

"Let him up, now. . . . . Here into this chair, Brandon." They lifted him, for the man seemed incapable of movement himself. He stared about from face to face, wide-eyed, bewildered as one might on a sudden waking from profound slumber. "Sit still now. We're simply going to get a few matters straight for these people."

He stood back a pace from the hunched figure in the chair and rubbed his chin with a knuckle.

"We got this citizen in quite a stew," he said and laughed. "He schemed to get me

out here—and did a good job; *how* doesn't matter, though. You saw me tied, there; that rope's soaked with oil. The place is drenched with it. He was just touching her off when you three came in and would have been as neat a murder as I've heard about in a coon's age! However, the finish he'd planned for me is only a detail."

"A lie!" Brandon muttered. "Was only trying—trying—letter—" He leaned forward and brushed his eyes unsteadily as he looked from face to face. His dull gaze fastened on Dawn. His lip drew back and the girl shuddered. "You too, eh?" he whispered. "Your sweet lover was in . . . . trouble, eh? And you came—to save him, eh?" He gave a whispered laugh. "Save him! For what? Think he'll take you?" he demanded, voice rising. "Think he'll take you, spawn of a murderer?"

A low moan slipped from the girl.

"Shut up!" Ben cried with a menacing gesture.

"Oh, don't be a dolt!" Brandon moved in his chair and sneered. His voice was clearer, now, much of the daze gone from his expression. "I know—I know her—and you . . . . Spawn of a murderer. A dowry, eh? A fine dowry to take to your lover!"

"No, no!" Dawn sobbed and turned away, hands to her ears. "No—my father didn't—couldn't—"

"Ah, so you think!" The man leaned forward, speaking slowly, bending his body with each word. "But Faxson died, and your father ran away; what more—"

"Stop it!"

MARTIN'S voice this, cutting in, and Brandon looked at him sharply. "Let her alone!" the man snapped. "It's unfair!"

"Unfair!"—in a whisper. "Unfair, eh? But it's *so*. He wont even deny it to his daughter. He doesn't even dare try to tell *her* he's not a murderer!" He drawled the last word. "A murderer. On this spot!" He stamped his foot, and Dawn looked about aghast, as though in an unfamiliar and terrible place. "Right here, he shot him—and drove him out—and left a smirch on you that no man'll have—daughter of a murderer!" As the girl shrank from him, Brandon leered, drunk with his power to hurt her. "And he wouldn't face trial. He's dead, probably. But if he lives—he's never dared even try to lie to you and tell you he was—"

"Oh, take me away!" Dawn cried beseechingly to Webster.

"Ha! It hurts, eh? It hurts, to know—"

"Hold your tongue, Brandon!" Martin's voice, this, thick and congested with a shaking rage.

He advanced toward Brandon slowly, head thrust forward. Eyes fast on the other's face, he reached a hand toward the table, groping for a pair of rusted shears which lay there.

"And you'd taunt her with it! Because McManus disappeared!" Martin said with low tensity. "Ah, it made a plausible case, Brandon. It, and your stories."

Then he did a strange thing. He lifted those shears in a quick gesture to his chin, and a lock of the thick beard fell away.

"And you'd make lives hell because you held the power. And you'd write McManus for years and tell him she was gone—that she was married—that she hated her father's name, eh?" Another lock of hair, and another. His blue eyes were burning, now, and Brandon's chin trembled as a look of horror crept into his eyes.

"But if he was to come back, Brandon, and swear to her with his own lips that he did not kill, swear so, to a girl like that, she'd believe him, wouldn't she?" The sound of the shears came again. One side of his face was shorn, the chin was emerging. "She'd believe him, wouldn't she, and be at peace. . . . . At peace—ay, at peace with herself and—the one she loves?"

He cut the last lock from the bearded jaw and flung away the shears. He stood erect, spreading his hands.

"See!" he cried. "See, Nick Brandon!"

The man in the chair made as if to rise. He could not. He lifted an arm as though to fend a blow.

"Denny!" he choked. "Denny McManus! You're a damned—you're a—"

He ended in a wild scream and cowered back against the wall, sobbing.

BESIDE Ben, Dawn was trembling like an aspen leaf. She clung to him with her hands.

"So I wouldn't come back, eh?" the man they had known as Martin cried and whirled to face her. "I came, Dawn! I've come back to tell you that I'm not afraid—that my heart's clean." He gathered her in his arms, dropped his cheek to her head and closed his eyes. "I'm no killer. I don't know who killed Faxson. Nick told me I

did, and I lost my head for an hour and then—I've hidden for years because he's written me things, terrible things to read, Dawn. But I couldn't stand it longer."

"And a warrant!" Brandon croaked. "A warrant's here—there, in Tincup. Murder wont outlaw. You'll pay—you'll pay—"

McManus moved his arms to draw Dawn even closer.

"But you'll know, Dawn. *You'll* know!" he murmured.

"Wait!" It was Ben Webster's sharp word which seemed to check that ebbing of all hope. "Dawn—Martin—Tim!"

He whirled and snatched his glove from the floor. With trembling hands he ripped the lining from its gauntlet and drew out a folded, soiled envelope.

"It's too tough!" he cried to Tim. "I can stand anything but that!"—nodding toward the man he had known as Martin and his daughter, Dawn McManus. "Brandon's right—about that warrant."

His thumb tore the flap open, and he spread the sheet of paper it contained on the table beside the lamp.

"Listen! This is the letter Don Stuart wrote the night he died."

Brandon, half risen from his chair and cowering against the wall, raised twitching fingers to his lips. McManus, holding Dawn close, strained forward.

"'I have been a coward,'" Ben read aloud. "'McManus did not kill Faxson. Brandon did. Brandon had McManus drunk and was getting him to sign away his share of the partnership when Faxson tried to stop it. McManus was too drunk to know what went on. Brandon shot Faxson and when McManus was sober enough to understand, told him that he—McManus—had done it. McManus believed him. I don't know what became of McManus. Brandon came to me before Sam died and told me McManus had lit out and that if I did not swear that Faxson said McManus shot at him he would send me to the pen for stealing from the company. This is God's truth. I was afraid to do anything else. I have been a coward. I am sorry I did not tell this years before.'"

HIS voice ended and save for the bubbling of wind in the chimney the place was very still.

Brandon's head was twitching. He looked wildly about.

"Lie," he gasped; "—drunken bum—"

"No lie, Brandon. It'll go in any court," Ben said without heat, quite soberly.

Tim Jeffers turned to McManus with a slow, gentle smile, and as he moved Brandon sprang forward. With a wild cry he gained the doorway, snatched it open and disappeared.

"Get him!" Tim cried and McManus followed, leaping out into the gloom of late afternoon. . . . .

"Don't leave me alone! Not here, Ben!"

It was this plea of Dawn's which arrested Ben on the threshold. He turned to see her swaying dizzily.

"Hold me! Hold me close. . . . . Ah, Ben, dear!"

Her arms clasped his neck and her lips responded to his. She began to cry softly.

"Easy!" he said unsteadily; "easy, now! It's all over. . . . . Everything's over!"

FOR a long interval they stood there locked in each other's arms while the wind soughed about the cabin. No sounds of the three who had fled into the darkness came for many minutes and then old Tim Jeffers stamped grimly into the room. He did not speak as the two faced him. He waited for the man who had been known as John Martin. . . . . He came slowly, this man, breathing heavily. His step was not certain as he crossed the threshold but his head was up, his eyes lighted curiously, as a young man's eyes may light in high moments.

"Compensation," he said in a whisper as he advanced toward Dawn, arms outstretched hungrily. She went into them, clinging to one of Ben's hands.

"What happened?" she asked.

"The Mad Cat," he said, "has him. . . . . Here it started. Into that river I was supposed to have gone, in a confession of murder. There he went tonight. . . . . We saw it, Tim and I—swept under the ice."

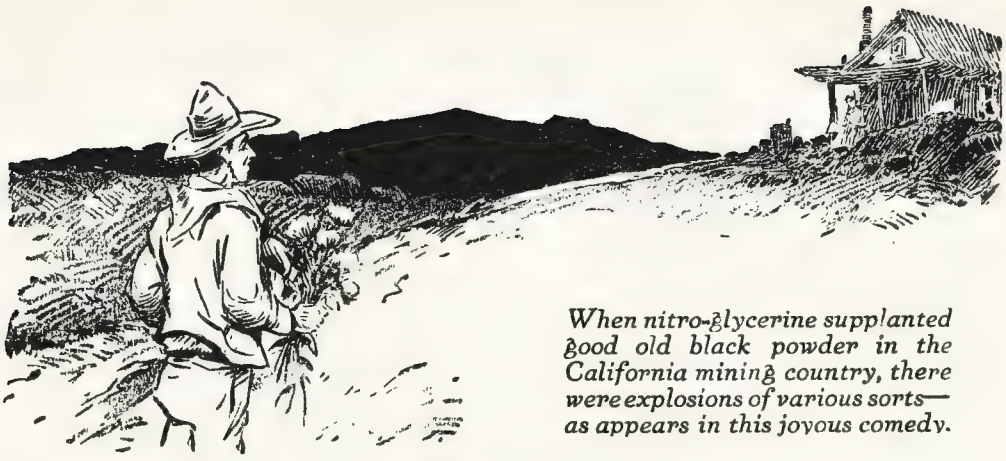
The girl shuddered but shook her head resolutely.

"It is no hour for tears," she said with a brave smile. "Father! You're home—vindicated. And Ben—oh, which one claims me first?"

Ben Webster rubbed his chin with a knuckle.

"Waiting even a moment will be hard," he said. "But which one of us waits? I don't know. That's too tough a nut for *me* to crack!"

THE END



When nitro-glycerine supplanted good old black powder in the California mining country, there were explosions of various sorts—as appears in this joyous comedy.

The Wooing of Pewee

By

ROBERT WELLES RITCHIE

Illustrated by
William Schmedtgen

"YESSIR," sagely said little Billy Meek, the accredited philosopher of Jackass Hill, "there's three domesticated animals what can see things along the road the human eye is blind to.

"Take your horse. You're ridin' him over the trail of a dark night and you come to Bloody Rock, where Reelfoot Williams killed three stage passengers back in '67. What does your horse do but take some little dance steps and whiffle down his nose and act like he's seen a rattlesnake? Son, that horse's seen somethin' there at Bloody Rock that you nor I nor any other man aint got the *pre*-ception power to see ourselves!

"And you take your dog. You in your blankets and him curled up front of the fire—and all of a sudden that dog's growlin' deep down in his throat and standin' stiff-legged with his back hairs roached up! Maybe you can't ca'm him down for fifteen minutes. Next morning you look for tracks of a prowler. Nary a track—critter or human. That dog's seen somethin' beyond human eyesight!"

Little Billy Meek unlimbered the big blade of his knife against a shapeless hunk of Old Peach, cut himself a long thin slice and curled his lower lip over it, a vaguely expectant look in the faded blue of his eyes. I knew it was my cue.

"And the third domesticated animal that sees things we—"

"Womenfolks," Billy promptly cut in, and after an impressive pause: "Which they can see farther and surer'n either horse or dog!"

I smothered my smile and asked with seeming innocence if Billy meant womenfolks could see things in the dark denied to men's vision. He slowly shook his white head and emphasized his reply by short waves of his knife-blade.

"Womenfolks—the general of 'em, I mean—has the power to look down into the insides of men like we was made of glass and to see shapes and specters there like maybe your horse sees at Bloody Rock. Only, seein' such, they don't r'ar and carry on; they just turn what they see to their own account. And we blind-eyed men set it all down as somethin' desp'ritely mysterious."

THERE was something delightfully naïve in this self-sure analysis of a subject which has been the crux of the world of men since Adam's fall—Little Billy Meek, weathered old hermit chipmunk atop his beloved Jackass Hill, undertaking to put the acid test to Eve's daughters! Little Billy Meek, out of his nigh four-score years, announcing a discovery which was hoary before the walls of Troy crumbled.

"Of course, Billy," I ventured with due humbleness, "if the ladies didn't have

some advantage over us there'd be no such thing as giving in marriage. Because they read us and know what they're about—"

"Read us—you're damned whistlin'!" —with a note of sharp asperity. And in his eyes I saw for an instant the ghost of some long-buried memory flickering back to plague the little old fellow. Knowing Billy Meek as I did, I was certain the lurking of that memory ghost had prompted the turn of his conversation. I had only to wait and inevitably he would trot that ghost out into the open and dress it decently in the garb of narrative.

A long silence. Billy absently whetted his knife-blade on his bootleg. His eyes were off on the sun-drenched hills which stretched, from this eyrie of Jackass Hill, up and up to the dim and snow-dappled Sierra crest forty miles back. All about rolled the contours of "Forgotten California," the land once harried and haggled by gold-diggers in their madness, now sleeping with its memories. And brooding over it all this survivor of brave days playing with *his* memories—knocking out shapes of wisdom on the anvil of those memories.

OVER yonder where you see Table Mountain slant down to the north (Billy Meek began) if you'll ride over there close in by the foot of the mountain you'll ride through Jacobtown. Only you wont know you're going through Jacobtown 'less you look sharp, because the old camp's all gone—growed up with manzanita and second-growth jack-pine. Time was, back yonder in the 'sixties, when three thousand men centered in and round Jacobtown, gopherin' and pocket-mining and turning over the old sluice-tailin's along the Tuolumne.

Why, son, a tall pindlin' fella from Virginia City, whose name I disremember right now, took five thousand and seven hundred dollars outa one pocket in that bald-faced hill yonder—and lost every pinch of his coarse gold down to the Long Tom fandango house in Jacobtown that night. The camp was a-r'arin', I tell you!

Nowadays a jaybird's squawk sounds loud as a rifle-shot up here on old Jackass. I've seen the time when the whamming and slam-banging of black-powder shots in holes in the ground all round here would've made you think this was Lookout Mountain. The boys got so used to handlin' the old black grain that some of 'em almost like to raise their bread with it! Matter of fact one of 'em —name was Horse Watson—did that very thing—by mistake, though. Dough on every tree for a half mile round—and pieces of Horse's shack!

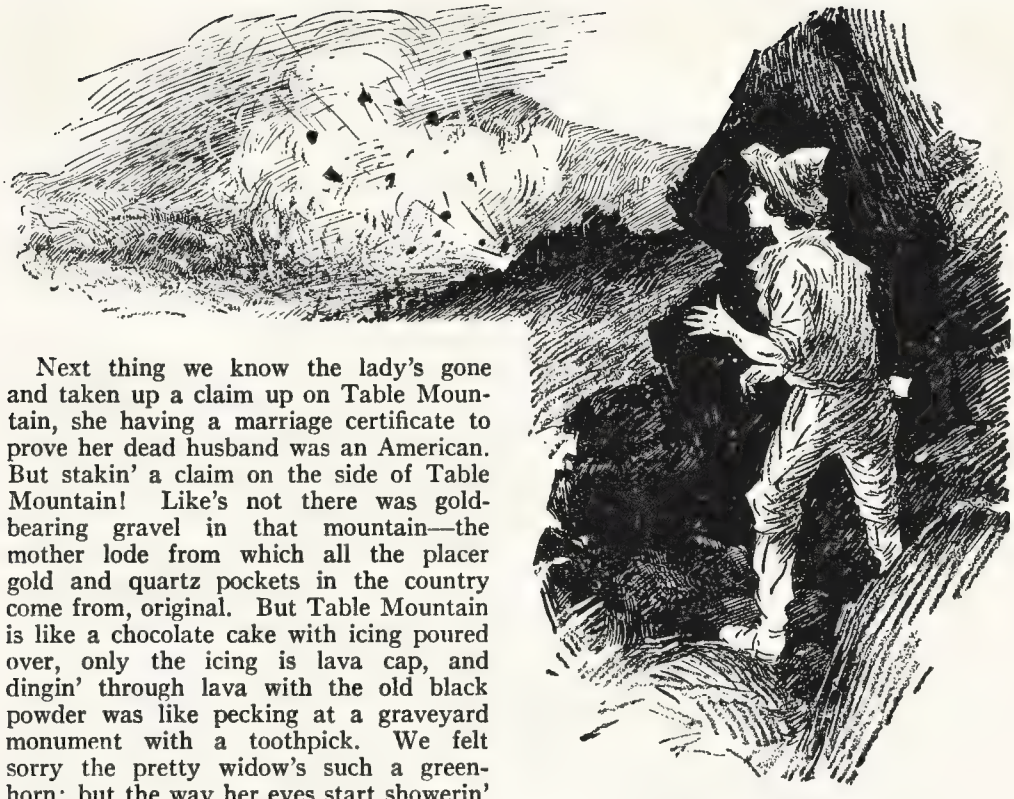
Well sir, me and my partner Sonora Slim has just got our triangle laid out for the pocket down there by the spring you passed circling up here to Jackass, when Donna Josefa Balmaceda sifts into this neck of the country. Mark that name down good—Donna Josefa Balmaceda; she's the female that first give me a line on how womenfolks see right through men's vest buttons.

SON, there was a widow woman for you! High-class Mex—no greaser strain. Taller'n the average woman and not an extra ounce on her. Eyes like polished horse-chestnuts in the sun; deadly and leth-*eal* weapons. She could sing to you with those eyes or bruise you all up, accordin' to her disposition. Under that big torty-shell comb she had roached up on her black head when she was dressed for a killin', and the lacy dew-dab like a tidy, which sorta water-falled down over her forehead, Donna Josefa's face was somethin' to lift a roughneck pocket-miner right outa his Visalia boots.

Now I'm tellin' you, when this Donna Josefa hits the Golden Eagle hotel in Jacobtown word flies round the diggings for five miles about, and men who hadn't fed at the Golden Eagle since it started business put bear's oil on their hair and a dickey under their chin and come romping in to catch them a sight of the beauty at supper-table.

Some of the boys don't make her right a-tall, figuring her to start a fandango place, maybe. One smart-aleck sank his pick into live powder that very first night at supper-table. Nobody knows just what he said to the newcoming beauty, or said in her hearing. Anyway, you know these big cans of red pepper that used to set round on hotel dining-room tables? Well, the top was loose on this one—and the smart-aleck got the whole of it in his face and eyes!

Which sorta establishes Donna Josefa with Jacobtown, you might say. Her stock's above par even before the market opens.



The Widow keeps right on dingin' at the lava-cap with her black-powder shots.

Next thing we know the lady's gone and taken up a claim up on Table Mountain, she having a marriage certificate to prove her dead husband was an American. But stakin' a claim on the side of Table Mountain! Like's not there was gold-bearing gravel in that mountain—the mother lode from which all the placer gold and quartz pockets in the country come from, original. But Table Mountain is like a chocolate cake with icing poured over, only the icing is lava cap, and dingin' through lava with the old black powder was like pecking at a graveyard monument with a toothpick. We felt sorry the pretty widow's such a greenhorn; but the way her eyes start showerin' lightning around holds off any galoot from giving her perfessional advice.

The number of volunteers offerin' to raise her cabin up on her hillside claim makes the job practically unanimous.

So there's Donna Balmaceda a reg'lar miner, with an old Mex named Ajo—which he's all falling apart from age like outworn harness—to muck out for her. There's this handsome widow woman a-peckin' and a-dingin' at hard lava, inching a tunnel away from the sunlight. With her own hands, dod burn me—single-jacking with her sledge and drill, loading up the holes with the old black grain and shootin' 'em off!

And she works in pants and boots. Pants—on a woman—in the 'sixties! Son, you should hear the cacklin' and the back-bitin' going on about those pants among the five respectable married women of Jacobtown!

Well, son, it was funny the way that trail up to Donna Josefa's cabin wore deep and broad. Every long-eared galoot round the Jacobtown diggings catches him some legitimate excuse for bootin' it up that trail often as may be. Look at me: Day after the cabin-raisin' I goes up there to ask has the widow seen our Nigger cat; then next day I have to go back to tell her not to worry about Nigger, because he's come home. Figure by that the power of Donna Josefa's eyes!

And when I tell you every one of these here yard-high stovepipes which was the popular head-covering of the bucks of those days was sold out of Jacobtown stores a week after the widow hit town—

(Little Billy Meek let his narrative trail off to silence. He reached for a sliver of pitch pine and began slicing it with his knife in specious concentration.)

BUT don't think for a minute I'm set to tell you one of these mushy love-stories like young folks read (defensively resumed Billy Meek). Nothing of the sort. I'm figurin' on provin' to you a woman can bore right through the hardest man-shell and read the pore, quiverin' soul inside. Like this Donna Josefa did, f'rinstance.

Which brings me, natural, to give you the plans and specifications of this li'l Pewee Patterson. Just an orphan who'd wintered hard, you'd say at first look; one of these pore, pindlin' no-shakes of a man what go skippy-footin' through life

like a water-spider on a pool. Sloped shoulders; hair no special color, but with a leanin' toward mouse fur; eyes squinched, and softy tenor-like voice. Fella what had no more place in a mining-camp than a pink-eyed rabbit! But somehow he got along, what with teaching school when there were any youngsters to teach, and clerkin' at the Cash Store in between-times.

And this here Pewee has the nerve to tromp up the trail to Donna Balmaceda's cabin along with the reg'lar men going to pay their court. Yes sir! And while us other lop-eared coyotes brought along presents like boxes of French soap or choice sides of bacon—useful things like, you might say—this Pewee fella'd show up with a fistful of wild tiger-lilies or a single red snowflower he'd walked fifteen miles to find, up Tuolumne cañon.

"Ah, be'old, gentlemen, thees Señor Padderson—'ow 'e 'as the soul poetic!" That's the widow receivin' of Pewee's nosegay before six or eight of us dumb mules settin' round on boxes in her shack—us, who figured havin' a soul poetic was one shade worse'n the break-bone!

Anybody strong enough to out-set Pewee those nights we were all yearnin' to be the last to go, with a tender word not to be overheard by a whole passel of competitors? No siree Bob! He'd set there on his box—or out on the pine-needles when the crowd was too big for Donna Josefa's shack and she moved the whole bilin'—and, saying next to nothing, he'd just stick. Colonel Marshall, an unreconstructed Rebel, full of Southern chivalry, and could wreathe flowers of language around the brow of the widow until all hours; Rawhead Roache—who could play jackstones with two anvils but couldn't tell you how much three and five make—he could tell stories of how brave and strong he was, till the widow says it's time for everybody to clear out. But when she gives that hint there's that li'l Virginia creeper Patterson still holdin' on!

We used to have our fights goin' home from Donna Josefa's cabin. But Pewee Patterson never tied into any of 'em. Nobody took him serious as a rival.

THEN come the time we sawn a whizzer off on Pewee which we figured to show him up before the widow proper and eliminate him, like you might say, from the love sweepstakes. Not that we ranked him as dangerous but just a pest to be eased out of the picture.

Fourth o' July is swingin' round and Jacobtown's all set to stage a celebration which'll knock the eye outa Sonora and Columbia. Parade, barbecue, anvil-firin', speeches, and by unanimous vote Donna Josefa Balmaceda is elected to be Goddess of Liberty to ride at the head of the percession.

Music is where we're stumped. Sonora and Columbia has their town bands, which Jacobtown hasn't. We've got a piano, though, down to the Big Nugget saloon and dance-hall; no trick at all to put that piano on the same wagon with the Goddess of Liberty and so lead off our parade with handsome music. Only here's where we hit bedrock—who's goin' to pound the piano?

"You mus' excuse me, gentlemen, of being thad Goddess de Libertad"—this is Donna Josefa laying down the law to our committee—"if thad 'ooman of the dance-hall is the only one in Jacobtown to play piano. I do not ride on the same wagon with 'er—my feelings, gentlemen, they would be outrage'!"

She meanin' to specify Mercedes, the Big Nugget girl. Wherein the same she's right; Mercedes is a good piano-player, but—

Then up pipes li'l Pewee Patterson: "I used to play the piano quite a lot back home, and if—"

"'Ave I not said it?" Donna Josefa gives Pewee her dazzlin'est smile. "Señor Padderson, the one man in all Jacobtown with the soul poetic!"

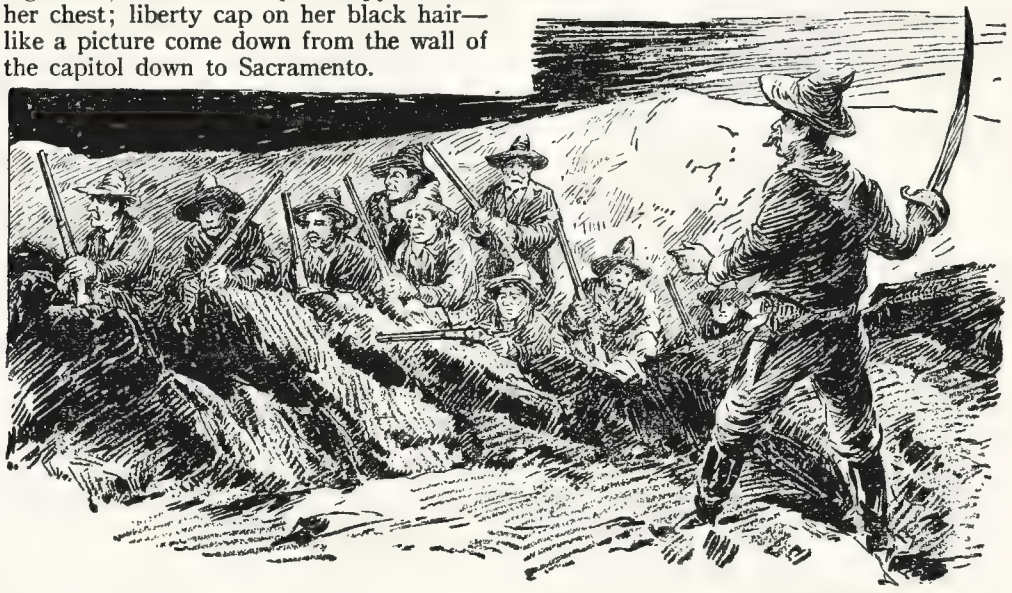
And there's our little poison ivy all fixed to ride with the Goddess of Liberty and scatter sweet music to the breeze!

WELL, right there's where the blindness of human folly—like the poet says—started in to go wall-eyed.

Jacobtown's got quite a lot of fire-eatin' Rebels headed by Colonel Marshall, and Appomattox was only two years behind us. As the Fourth drew near, this man and that—all members of the Donna Josefa Courtin' Club—began dropping dark hints in Pewee's ear: Marshall and his Rebs might try to bust up the parade; Marshall'd sworn Jacobtown couldn't wave the bloody shirt in his face. Like that—disquietin' rumors. And Pewee took 'em all with his li'l eyes just squinched tighter 'n tighter.

The Big Day! *Wham* go the anvils.

Whoop-la clear from the town dump to Big Pine Flat. And here comes the percession down Jacobtown's only street: Me, the grand marshal, on a white horse, then the Jacobtown Grays with bucktails in their hats, then the goddess on a wagon with the piano and Pewee. Son, she was a rim-fire goddess! Tall and straight and regal-like; Stars and Stripes wrapped round her chest; liberty cap on her black hair—like a picture come down from the wall of the capitol down to Sacramento.



"Steady, men!" whiffles Marshall, draggin' out his saber. "Stead-day!"

And there's li'l Pewee all hunched over the piano; face white as a dude's glove, eyes not darin' to look up from the keys—Pewee, thrashin' out "Marching Through Georgia!"

Just as the goddess-wagon gets opposite the two-story express office—*wham-bang!* Two shotguns and a revolver blaze from the roof. Not Marshall and his gang; they've all gone fishing. Just blanks fired by one of the boys we'd planted up there.

At the volley Pewee Patterson just fell over backwards, toppled over the wagon-tail and landed on all-fours in the dust. 'Thout a look to left or right, he took it down an alley and out to the timber like a scared jack-rabbit.

(Old Billy Meek surprised a grin lurking under his whiskers and promptly smoothed it away with a back-handed swipe of his hand. A little shamefacedly, as if even after these sixty years the ghost of that panicky Pewee Patterson had arisen to accuse him.)

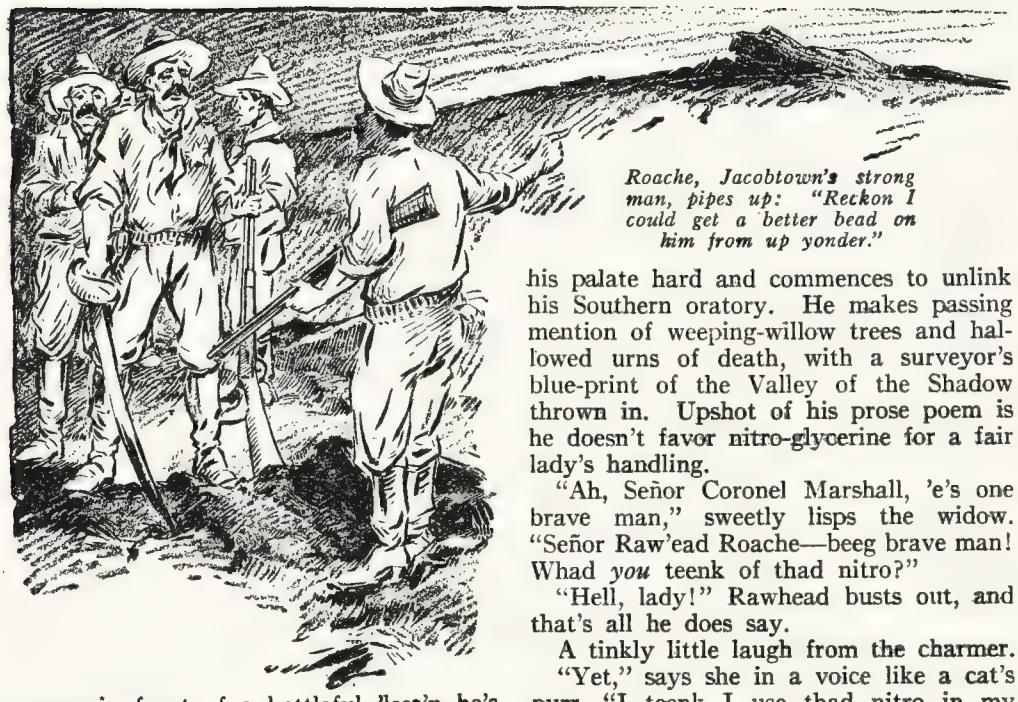
We might've laughed then — us gay young sprigs who thought we'd sawn a whizzer off on Pewee! But now when I've caught me a little sense—and figure what a griev-ious thing fear is—how this li'l Patterson fella went and wrassled with fear and took a fall out of it—

("But what about Donna Josefa?" I asked. "Did she cut Pewee Patterson off her list because he'd shown the white feather?"

(The philosopher of Jackass Hill gave me no answer. His old eyes were off on the sun-washed slopes of Table Mountain, building pictures against the heat haze.)

PEWEE went to live over to Sonora after that Fourth (abruptly Billy Meek swung himself back from reverie). We never saw him again climbin' the trail to the widow's cabin to set out all and sev'ral courtin' fools. Donna Josefa never by so much as a word give us a line on what she thought of him. We forgot about him.

Well, that fall of '67, word begins to sift through all the southern mines about a strange new explosive called nitroglycerine some foreigner'd invented. We hear one shot of this poured into a drill hole in your tunnel face will rip out more rock than twenty of the old-fashioned black grain. Only trouble with this newfangled blastin' mixture, so the rumor is, it's so touchy and high-powered a man don't dare



Roache, Jacobtown's strong man, pipes up: "Reckon I could get a better bead on him from up yonder."

sneeze in front of a bottleful 'less'n he's ready to meet his Maker.

With each telling the stories 'bout nitroglycerine grow taller: A pint of it would blow away Table Mountain; just a flicker of sunlight on a carboy of the stuff knocked off a whole city in France—stuff like that. Then a salesman comes up from San Francisco to take orders for this chain lightnin'.

Well, son, every miner in and around Jacobtown gets all fired up about this here jiggity stuff—like a fella searchin' his heart to get spunk enough to kiss a girl and don't dast. We're all standin' on one foot with excitement, waitin' for the first son-of-a-gun to take a chance. Then Donna Josefa springs her trap.

It was one Wednesday or Saturday night when the widow's receiving callers—fifteen more or less, all the old reg'lars, and no man darin' count himself more favored than another. We're hunkered down under the Chinee lanterns she's strung from tree to tree, romantic-like, and she's singing a Spanish love-song to the plunk of her guitar. Suddenly she breaks off her music.

"I teenk," says Donna Josefa, "I lak make try of thad nitro—nitro—what-you-call-it, in my tunnel. Heh?" A Chinaman's silence all round the circle. The widow slowly turns her head to look from face to face.

"Whad you teenk, Coronel Marshall—heh?"

Then this roach-maned Rebel swallows his palate hard and commences to unlink his Southern oratory. He makes passing mention of weeping-willow trees and hallowed urns of death, with a surveyor's blue-print of the Valley of the Shadow thrown in. Upshot of his prose poem is he doesn't favor nitro-glycerine for a fair lady's handling.

"Ah, Señor Coronel Marshall, 'e's one brave man," sweetly lisps the widow. "Señor Raw'ead Roache—beeg brave man! Whad *you* teenk of thad nitro?"

"Hell, lady!" Rawhead busts out, and that's all he does say.

A tinkly little laugh from the charmer.

"Yet," says she in a voice like a cat's purr, "I teenk I use thad nitro in my tunnel. Whad Donna Josefa Balmaceda wants, thad almos' always she gets. Some beeg brave man 'ere brings from San Francisco to me ten gallon of thad nitro!"

Son, not a whisper out of that whole circle of mangy cowards. The lady runs her fingers lightly over the guitar-strings and circles a bright smile all round. Her voice comes like the li'l whisper of bees' wings:

"For 'im who brings me thad ten gallon of nitro I 'ave not wealth to reward. I 'ave to give—only my 'and—in marriage. So small a t'ing for reward!

"And, señores, eet is but fair I write of thees thing to Señor Padderson in Sonora—heem you call coward."

That was all. That party under the widow's pine-trees died early. Everybody sorta sifted away.

Next day word comes over the hill from Sonora that Pewee Patterson, behind two mules and in a springless wagon, has lit out down the road to San Francisco.

The word spreads all through the county that this crazy Patterson fella has gone to the bay city to fetch back ten gallons of sudden death. And here's where the cussedness of human nature begins to get in its play: We members of the courtin' club—we who had our chance to do what Pewee's gone to do and didn't dast—are the wildest shouters ag'in' him. Whatsomever we might've thought about the dangers of

nitro-glycerine before, now we're convinced it's our public duty to head off Patterson from endangerin' life and limb in Tuolumne county.

Marshall, who's a lawyer by trade, gallops over to the county seat and gets out a paper against Pewee which aims to restrain him from transportin' dangerous explosives over any road, trail, highway or bridge in the county of Tuolumne; and this paper is put in the hands of the Sheriff to serve. Our representative in the Legislature lays a memorial before the Governor, directing his attention to the fact all southwestern Tuolumne county is in danger of ceasing to be a part of the State of California; and how 'bout his ordering out the First California Volunteers?. A vigilance committee sends out riders to all the camps and towns right down to tidewater to warn 'em ag'in' a wild man in a springless wagon with Judgment Day under the seat.

The Widow Balmaceda, she keeps right on dingin' at the lava cap in her tunnel face with her li'l ole black-powder shots, saying not a word. And not a red-top boot goes up the red dust trail to her cabin.

A WEEK goes by. Then word sifts up from the valley that the nitro-glycerine man is on his way home—and towns are being deserted along his path.

Then one night we hear the Jacobtown fire bell ring 'bout nine o'clock; when all the Redshirts of Number One rally round, there's this limber-jawed Colonel Marshall on a bar'l in front of the firehouse, wavin' a telegram a rider's just brought over from Sonora.

"Rally, brave men!" bawls Marshall. "Rally to the defense of your homes and firesides! Patterson, the madman, is on the move this way with sudden death and perdition right under his coat-tails. Forward, men, to check him ere it is too late!"

Just when half the camp, with horses and weapons, gathers in front of the post-office, here comes larrupin' a fella on a lathered horse.

"Jamestown's all cleared out!" he yells. "Not a man, woman or child left; and Patterson was only five miles away when I rid over here to warn you!"

Then when we're all galloping down the road beyond Sonora, here comes another fella, his horse nigh done in.

"Chinese Camp's taken to the hills! Signal-fire'll be lit on Old Baldy when he starts to make the grade up to Sonora."

"We'll make a stand here," whinnies this here Colonel Marshall, "and shoot to kill when Patterson comes along!"

"But supposin' we miss Patterson and hit the nitro?" some bright angel of hope wishes to know.

Well, son, that was a tryin' night. More especial when, 'long towards morning, we see the signal-fire burn over on Baldy—and know ten gallons of scatteration drove by an idiot will soon be in our midst. The Sheriff says he's helpless to stop Pewee; he's tried three times, down the road, to serve the paper by laying it in the middle of the road ahead of the death-wagon—and looking down from a near-by mountain top, he see Pewee drive right over the command of the law.

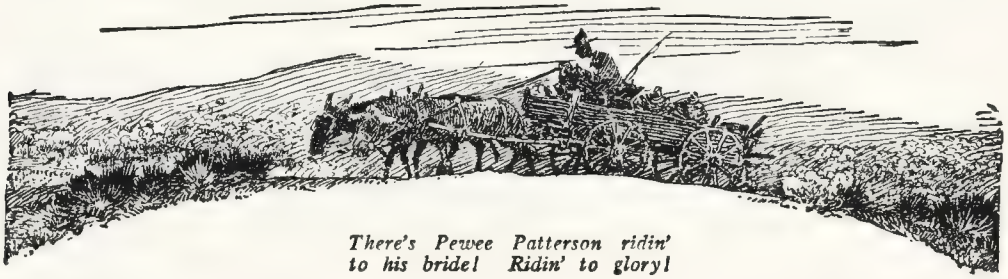
Just 'bout when it's gettin' light enough to see through rifle-sights, in come galloping the two pickets Marshall had advanced down by Snake Creek bridge:

"He's comin'!" they yells.

"Steady, men!" whiffles Marshall, dragging out his Confed'rate cavalry saber which he's carrying strapped around his waistband. *"Steaday!"*

Then Rawhead Roache, Jacobtown's strong man, pipes up: "Reckon I could get a better bead on him from up yonder where that out-crop shows," pointing to a big beak of rock a half-mile up the mountain-side.

Just then, when everything is still, we hear the rumble of wheels crossing Snake



There's Pewee Patterson ridin' to his bride! Ridin' to glory!

Creek bridge. Like the sound of hearse wheels. Then off goes this Rawhead Roache, hell-bent for leather, drivin' his horse through the brush.

But he doesn't reach that outcrop first. Colonel Marshall beats him, with all the rest of us brave vigilantes close behind.

Then, with no man caring to look his neighbor square in the eyes, that congregation of cowards looks down at the picture of a brave man about his business.

Li'l Pewee Patterson, who'd showed the white feather before a volley of blanks on Fourth o' July; li'l Pewee Patterson, the one man of all Jacobtown which Donna Josefa had read for a hero! There he is, sittin' on the seat of that ol' springless wagon behind two sleepy mules that're snailin' along at a walk; him all drawed in on hisself like a fella who expects a kick under the coat-tails, his head perked forward like a snappin' turtle's so's he can watch sharp for every bump in the road.

Right under the grain-sack of his seat are two whoppin' big glass bottles wrapped around with basket-work. There's Pewee Patterson ridin' to his bride! Ridin' to glory!

Shoot at him? Us? Why, dammit, son, ev'ry lop-eared coyote on that mountainside was prayin' for him!

OLD Billy Meek looked off to where the westering sun was ballooning out into a carnelian globe in the bank of haze overhanging the valley. He wet his finger and held it up to learn whether the first stirring of the evening breeze might be coming to lay balm to the scars of the day's heat. *Snap* went shut his knife-blade and he cast aside the last thin sliver of his pitch-pine whittling. This pantomime of a task completed was to prompt my giving of the cue for his tag-line.

I did not fail him. . . . .

"Oh, *them?*" he echoed carelessly. "Well, after the Widow Balmaceda became Mrs. Pewee Patterson and they come back from their honeymoon down to the bay, they start in together tearin' the whole insides outa Table Mountain with their nitro-glycerine. And in less'n a month they break through the lava cap, smack into the old gravel channel, which's just fat with free gold!

"'Gold lies w'ere you find it,' says Donna Josefa. 'I found mine all in one nugget—thad so-brave Señor Pewee Padderson!'"

A Speculation in Shipwrecks

By

CULPEPER ZANDTT

A tale of desperate adventure on Oriental seas such as only Culpeper Zandtt knows how to write—probably the best of these notable exploits of our friend Dr. Galt.

MISS LAMBERTON had noticed during the first dinner after leaving Hongkong that there seemed to be no love lost between Captain Grimes and Muggins, the mate. Both were of the older, rougher type of seafaring men seldom met with in these days save on the smaller cargo-boats run by pinching North Country owners. In fact, the *Siberia* herself was no swan or princess among steamers. Carrying about four thousand tons, d. w., she hadn't been painted for over a year or in dock for nearly twice that, so was carrying possibly another hundred tons of barnacles in addition to her cargo of "China general," which was of rather more value than is usually shipped in a craft of that sort. Starvation rates, a bit more insurance, and lack of other tonnage offering were the answers to that. And much the same considerations had governed the twelve passengers when booking on her. There was accommodation for sixteen, with everything full, but a dozen were all the agents had been able to get for the voyage home to Liverpool. If she reached that port, her penurious owners would probably net thirty per cent in spite of the low rates; the shippers would have at least fifteen per cent, and the passengers about forty, providing they survived the food served to them.

To the other passengers, the most interesting one of their number was a supposed Parsee merchant, Dubbletjee Sewassemee—

In the morning all hands were stowed in the boat with as much of their luggage as might safely be carried.

Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson

who was understood, nobody knew just why or how, to be actually the Rao Sahib of Barpaneer, a minor Hindu aristocrat of princely blood. He dressed quietly but expensively in European clothes, was quite evidently a varsity man and one of presumable wealth. For Miss Lamberton he appeared to have taken a noticeable liking during their first evening at sea —described for her his native city in the Northwest Provinces, what the everyday life of the people was like, their manners, customs and superstitions—incidentally some of his own, which struck her as so different from the usual run that she mentioned one or two of them to Captain Grimes, later, when she stopped him for a brief chat at the foot of the bridge-ladder.

"HOW do you like our Parsee passenger, Captain—Mr. Sewassemee?"

"He aint no more a Parsee than you are, miss—I never see no Parsee, yet, that didn't wear his patent-leather miter-hat sometime in the twenty-four hours—somethin' to do with his religion, I fancy; nor I never see one with Hinju caste-marks on his forehead. Take a look at 'em in the mornin'. This chap's high-caste, somewheres in Injia. I wouldn't say he's a maharajah or rajah, 'cause he hasn't the commandin' manner for that—a thakore sahib or a rao sahib, more like."

"Well—that's what we've been thinking too—what Mrs. Forbes-Marleigh said. She's lived in India a good bit, you know. Isn't it odd what queer superstitions those people have! So entirely out of the ordinary. He told me he had refused to book on the two Liverpool boats ahead of this because he couldn't get Stateroom H or Room Number Eight on either of them. H, you see, is the eighth letter of the alphabet—it makes no difference to him whether the room has a letter or a number, but it must be the eighth, one way or the other."

"Oh, there'll be no accounting for the ideas those chaps have! Did he give ye any reason for it?"

"Yes. He said that one of his relatives —an uncle or a cousin, possibly—had been on a boat going from Calcutta to London some years ago—limited-accommodation-boat, like this—and had been given Stateroom H. Somewhere, crossing the Sea of Arabia, he disappeared—never has been heard from since that day. The London agents held his luggage until one of the family came to London with an order for it. Mr. Sewassemee feels sure that if he keeps traveling in Stateroom H or Eight, his relative's ghost will communicate with him sooner or later and explain exactly what happened, how he disappeared, whether he was murdered by some enemy."

"Poppycock! All these Hinjus are a bit psychic, d'ye see. One notices them doin' things there's no explainin' in any ord'n'ry way. But that ghost mummery is sheer nons'nse! Chap may be a bit balmy —I'll have a chat wi' him an' see."

"Could I go up on the bridge with you, Captain? I'd like awfully to see how you run the ship!"

"Ye can *not*, miss—leastways, not at night! 'Gainst the regulations. Mayhap on some bright clear day I'll be takin' ye up—when there'll be no other passengers on deck. Really no place for ye—nothin' to see—distract the watch-officer's attention

from keepin' a careful eye out for other boats or dirty weather. An' she'll not be a 'ship' at all, d'ye see! If ye'll but turn up Lloyd's *Register,* ye'll find her described as a 'two-masted steel schooner, single screw, triple-expansion, reciprocatin' engines.' So many tons—so many feet in length, draft an' beam. Date she was built, flag—an' whether she ever had any other name than this.

"When you speak of a *ship,* ye can mean but one type o' boat—a three- to six-masted sailin' craft, square-rigged on all of 'em. That'll be a ship. Anything else will not. Wi' no masts at all, she's a *boat*—no matter what the power. Wi' two masts square-rigged an' the mizzen sloop-rigged—she's a *barque.* Foremast square, main an' mizzen sloop-rigged—a *barkentine.* Two masts, square—a *brig.* One mast square an' one sloop—a *brigantine.* Two to six masts, sloop or fore-an'-aft rigged—a *schooner.* One mast 'fore-an' aft rigged—a *sloop.* Today, there'll be no such thing as a steam*ship* afloat, anywhere. All yard-arms have been scrapped an' nothin' but pole-masts used—for wireless aërials an' code-signal flags—no good for anything else. An' there'll be another p'int for ye to remember—when, belike, ye're lookin' at picters in the cinema. No fore-an'-aft-rigged craft is ever anything but a coaster. Deep-water craft are all square-rigged on most of their masts—ships, barques, brigs or brigantines—not schooners. I'm speakin' o' sailin'-craft, o' course."

THE Captain turned just then and for the first time noticed that Muggins, the mate, was standing on the bridge at the top of the ladder—where he could distinctly hear what they were saying.

"What is it, Muggins?"

"Nothin', sir—I was just list'nin' to the lecture on ships. There's a deal o' folk ashore what should know more'n they do about 'em."

"Well, you go down to le'ward when ye see me talkin' to anybody! D'ye hear!"

With a low-muttered snarl, the mate strolled across to the starboard end of the bridge in a way that was in itself insubordinate. The master saw and heard him but apparently paid no attention. In a day or two, he meant to give Muggins a demonstration of authority—verbal and physical—which the fellow would remember for some time. Muggins silently cursed Grimes, but what he had overheard about their Oriental passenger was too absorbing for anything else to sidetrack it for long. He took no stock whatever in the idea of a personal superstition compelling anyone to travel only in a room with a certain number. Himself superstitious in various ways, he didn't know it. To him, nobody did anything like that without an object—and he racked what brain he had to figure out what that object might be.

This Sewassemee, now? Chap appeared to have a good bit of tin—Hindu-Brahmin, not Parsee. From the almost unnoticeable caste-marks on his forehead, he belonged in some way to the ruling class. The relative who had disappeared from Stateroom H on some unknown boat would be of the same caste—probably quite wealthy. Most of these high-caste Hindus were connoisseurs in precious stones and rarely traveled without a number of gems upon them, somewhere. Suppose, now, that this relative had been carrying a small fortune upon him in some form or other—and to lessen the risk while on board, had contrived a place of concealment for it in his stateroom? Possible enough! Take this Sewassemee: He'd be likely to know pretty much what his relative had with him when he sailed. Disappearing so mysteriously, the relative probably had no chance to get his valuables from their place of concealment in his stateroom. Fair to suppose they must be there yet—unless the boat had been entirely rebuilt below-decks. And the *Siberia* had never had more than minor alterations. Only question—what steamer was it? Even if Sewassemee knew her name, that wasn't any too reliable information, because steamers change owners and are rechristened every day. Chap must be going on more definite clues than that, for it would be a hopeless task to book upon every boat of a certain tonnage and inner-construction. Take a lifetime!

MUGGINS began making opportunities for passing the windows of Stateroom H on the boat-deck—glancing in, if the blind happened to be pushed back into its bulkhead socket. Four times he got a good view of the room and the way its occupant's luggage was stowed—some of it on the upper berth, some under the lower berth, a bag on the transom. (The man had paid an extra half-fare to insure having the room to himself.) Upon

When he reached the after rail, a hand grasping a clasp-knife came over his shoulder.

one occasion the occupant was wearing a tightly wrapped turban of green silk, thus disposing of the Parsee fiction and lending more color to the man's having some object aside from superstition in choosing that particular room.

Muggins continued his spying once too often, and was caught by the Captain trying to peer through the slats of the blind on the second night out, and fetched up to the master's cabin abaft the wheelhouse for a reprimand.

"Aw, I wasn't doin' no harm, sir! There'll be no women in that room—an' that Hinju aint straight! He's up to somethin'—needs a bit o' watchin' afore he sets the boat on fire, or sinks her!"

"When I require ye to spy upon a passenger, Muggins, I'll be tellin' ye so! Let me see ye doin' it again without orders, an' ye'll catch what-for before ye know what's happenin'. I've a look at every stateroom when I go the rounds on general inspection each mornin', an' know fairly well what'll be goin' on in 'em. So ye'll just keep your eyes an' your pryin' to yourself, Muggins! Understand?"

The mate thought he did understand. Evidently the "old man" had been figuring along much the same lines and taking advantage of his general inspection, each morning, to study the lay of things in that stateroom. This naturally enraged Muggins still more against the master. . . . . Suppose that Sewassemee mysteriously disappeared, as his relative had done—before he'd had time to find whatever might be secreted about that room? Would the Captain make a private search of it, afterward —or would he more naturally assume that whatever there might be of value connected with the man was either in his luggage or on him when he disappeared? On the whole, Muggins was inclined to favor the latter view; with the Hindu permanently eliminated, he could easily find opportunity for getting into the unoccupied stateroom for a search on his own account—preferably after midnight.

The more he thought this over, the more it appealed to him; he began studying the Hindu's habits and noticed that the man liked to come out on deck at a pretty late hour for a final cheroot before retiring for the night. After that, Sewassemee hadn't a chance in the world. Muggins had no more conscience than a hungry tiger—no more scrupulousness than a spider trapping flies. What he wanted, he took—what he found in his way, he eliminated.

WITH a drizzling rain and thick clouds obscuring the stars, it was as black a night on deck as one ever sees; yet the Hindu put on a rain-coat and stepped out of the saloon-companion just after eight bells had gone, with a lighted cheroot in his mouth. This glowing spark revealed his movements in the darkness, up and down the little boat-deck—and when he reached the after-rail overlooking the well-deck, a hand grasping a clasp-knife came over his shoulder. The blade was firmly pushed down inside his collar-bone, severing the

jugular vein and choking off the bubbling scream which started at its contact. Then, before life was quite extinct, he was seized in a powerful grip, lifted over the rail and dropped into the choppy sea rushing by alongside—all this, mind you, from a mere supposition of the mate's, which might prove to have no foundation in fact. But it eliminated the first and greatest obstacle to his finding out.

WHEN Sewassemee didn't turn up at breakfast, it was supposed that he merely had a touch of seasickness. When the room-steward knocked about ten o'clock and found the door unlocked, he simply put the room in order, supposing the man to be on deck. When he failed to appear for tiffin, the steward, who also was on duty in the saloon, ran up on deck to see if the Hindu wanted a tray sent to him—but finding no trace of him, reported this to the Captain. After tiffin Grimes made a quiet but thorough search of the entire boat from her fo'c'stle aft to the turtle-deck—below, to engine-room and stokehold. That night, he made an entry in the log that the supposed Parsee passenger apparently had fallen overboard at some time during the night, and for the next twenty-four hours a general depression settled over the ship.

Before this had a chance to wear off, another stunning tragedy intensified the feeling. The Captain had been recalling, through the day, Muggins' spying upon the Hindu—his unexplained interest in the man and his stateroom—so had kept the mate under observation. When Muggins came off the bridge at eight bells and started below, the Captain followed him—saw the man slip along the little social-hall and go into Stateroom H. Giving him ten minutes, Grimes quietly stepped in and closed the door behind him. Articles from the Hindu's luggage were scattered about the room—pillows, mattress and transom-cushion had been ripped apart. The mate, red-faced from his exertions, whirled about with a muttered curse.

"My word, Muggins! What's all this? What'll ye be doin' in this room?"

"Talk lower, man—an' I'll give it to ye straight! Ye thought this Hinju was superstitious or balmy, pickin' out a Number Eight room whate'er boat 'e was on—but I'm thinkin' 'e *wasn't!* How if t'other chap 'e said wor a relative stowed away somethin' vallyble in this werry room, that v'yge—when 'e disappeared? Eh? Tell me that! Well, d'ye see, this Hinju, 'e finds it wor on this werry same boat, an' books aboard in this werry room so's 'e can 'unt for it on the quiet wi' nobody a watchin' 'im. Well, d'ye see, 'e went overboard hisself, most unexpected. So there'll be no reason w'y I shouldn't come in an 'ave a look-see for myself. Now you're here—an' we can just split whate'er we finds, between us. Wot?"

"Muggins—ye're a damned thievin' scoundrel! I believe ye shoved Sewassemee overboard, yourself!"

"W'ich I aint sayin' is so, an' you aint a-provin'! But wot if I did? There'll be nothin' to prove anything hidden about this room belongs to tha nigger, will there? 'E's as much of a thief, hisself, as eyther o' us—aint 'e? Findin's, keepin's, is always been th' rule—aint it? An' I'm offerin' to split with ye when I might ha' kept my trap shut an' 'ad another go at this on the quiet. Wot?"

"Ye'll just be puttin' everything back in the trunk an' bags as ye found them—then I'll have the lot taken up to my cabin until I can turn 'em over to the agents in Liverpool for the poor devil's heirs! If I get any proof that ye killed him, ye'll go in the brig an' go ashore in irons! Now put the stuff back an' get out o' here!"

"But—I say, Grimes! This'll be just man to man between us! I'll bet on there bein' a lot o' tin or jools somewheres about this place—more'n ye'll make in a lifetime as master o' any deep-water boat! Will ye be passin' up a chance like that just because ye'll not split wi' me? Chuck me in tha brig an' hog it all yerself? Gwan! Put me in th' brig if ye like—but I'll be tellin', ashore, how I found ye goin' through a dead man's luggage, an' that wotever ye found ye kept, d'ye see!"

"About two words more, Muggins, an' ye'll go in the brig anyway!"

"Well, then—*put* me in, if ye're man enough! C'mon, now!"

There was an automatic in the Captain's hand before Muggins quite saw where it came from—but the mate didn't believe the other man would actually shoot, and his hand stole back under his coat.

"Put up your hands or I'll plug ye!"

The mate's fingers were now gripping the butt of a gun in his own pocket, and he hesitated a second before complying. When that hand started to go up, the pistol came with it—but the Captain fired before

the weapon was entirely out from under the coat, the bullet going through Muggins' hairy chest and his right lung, followed by a second one close beside it. The mate coughed in a tight, choking way; a little stream of blood trickled down his chin. It was becoming increasingly difficult to breathe at all, but the man was physically a gorilla—life ebbed slowly. Raising his pistol with a firm enough grip, he sent a shot through the Captain's heart at a distance of less than eighteen inches—and then his legs crumpled under him.

THE night-watch of two stewards, in the saloon, heard the shots through the well-hole of the social-hall, and started running up the companion. The second mate heard them through the window, from the bridge, and got there just after the stewards—nobody else appearing to have been aroused by the muffled reports. Not being able to think of anything else to do, Brady ordered the stewards to put each body on the bunk in its own room. While they were doing this, he repacked the scattered clothing and personal belongings, drew the ripped cushions together as best he could, restoring the room to some appearance of order. When the stewards returned, he had them clean up the blood and stitch the mattress together, roughly—then locked the door.

Brady's mind worked slowly, foggily—sometimes more so, sometimes almost normally. The boat was illegally short-handed, the crew being scraped from the scourings of Liverpool with three *khalasies* thrown in for lack of others available at the moment—and the *khalasies* understood perfectly what was the matter with Brady's thinking-machine, the white races being unable to keep a drug-habit relatively innocuous for long periods as the Orientals do.

In the morning, when the absence of the officers from breakfast would be noted, it occurred to Brady that some action would have to be taken—so he called the chief and his assistant up to the Captain's cabin for a conference—the motionless, sheet-draped body in the bunk draining the color from their faces as they nervously glanced at it. Brady managed to get the story out, in halting sentences, and one of the stewards confirmed it. Pye, the assistant, was rotten with fever, and had all he could do to sit out his watch in the engine-room while McVey was off duty. The chief appeared to be the only level-headed officer left on board in efficient condition, but he knew nothing of navigation whatsoever—which left Brady as the only navigator. The situation appeared obvious to all of them, but McVey summed it up for the sake of having each one's responsibility distinctly understood.

"Pye an' mysel' will be handlin' matters below, d'ye mind—wi' the help o' stokers an' greasers standin' extra watch upon occasion. An' Brady'll be shootin' tha sun tae keep her on her coorse—wi' mebbe tha help o' a quartermaster-body on tha bridge whiles he's takin' his watch below. Bowles'll be poorser an' chief steward as befoor. Ye kin be makin' tha big *khalasi* a quartermaster—forbye he's a sound mon at tha wheel an' riggin'. Then—we'll be puttin' in at Singapoor for anither master an' mate, Ah'm thinkin'. Eh?"

"An' wot'll we be doin' wi' these stiffs, Mac? Takin' 'em into Singapore f'r buryin'?"

"Nae—we've no way o' presairvin' 'em. So we'll just be sewin' 'em oop wi' gratebars, the nicht, an' droppin' 'em over tha side wi' a chapter frae tha Book an' a worrd o' prayer. An' ye'll be main carefu', mon, where ye'll be puttin' her on tha charts—'tis nae so guid naveegatin', Ah'm told, onywhere in tha China Sea."

FOR the next two days the voyage appeared to be progressing quite normally. As nobody on board except himself could have figured out the boat's reckoning, Brady had nothing to fear from any meddling suggestions about the navigation. But a vague uneasiness was becoming oppressive in his mind. Even with an extra grain of his white powder medicine each day, he couldn't concentrate upon the rules for computing his position or just how he should use the tables in the Nautical Almanac. Since the noon after the Captain's death, thick weather had set in—he hadn't been able to get the sun. But if his observation that day had been correct, his dead-reckoning since must be fairly close to the mark, he thought, even if he had forgotten to allow for current-drift and wind on her starboard bow.

The steamer-track for full-powered vessels from Hongkong to Singapore is about S. by W. to the passage between the Paracel and Macclesfield banks—then S. W. by S. to the Anamba Islands and S. S. W. to Singapore Strait, clearing the shoals off the Indo-China coast and giving a wide

berth to the Dangerous Ground off Borneo. But in spots it is close navigating, at that —particularly at the lower end of the China Sea, where a minimum of error in calculation will put a boat on any one of several different shoals or coral rocks.

In the drizzly, occasionally thickening weather, next morning, Brady sighted what he supposed to be an outlying rock in the Anamba Group—instead of which it was actually Semione Island in the Natunas. And this naturally piled the boat up, that night, on the Rittan Bank in the southern edge of the Anambas—a place where a partly submerged steamer would probably remain unseen by any passing craft for months at a time, for the fortnightly Koninklijke boat from Singapore only touches at Jimaya and Pulau Panjang en-route for the Natunas.

THE reef itself broke the force of the slapping monsoon waves on the south side of it, and the old *Siberia* slid up on one of the ledges for a little more than half her length and rested there, her hull vibrating from the revolving screw until Pye shut off steam in the engine-room and went on deck to see what she had struck. In the murk, he couldn't see the surf pounding on the other side of the reef, but could hear, faintly, its booming—and saw that there would be little risk of the boat's pounding herself to pieces until the monsoon changed, though wind and unusually high tide might push her off the ledge at any time. In which case, if any of her plates had been punctured, she would fill and go down in what looked like pretty deep water off her stern. Going up to the bridge, he spoke to Brady, who was looking stupidly over the side as he tried to figure out just what had happened.

"Well—you see where you've put her, Brady! Any idea what bank it'll be?"

"There's just no bank here at all—'less we been makin' double time ag'in' the monsoon! Look ye, Pye! We sights one o' tha Anamba rocks to loo'ard at two bells this afternoon, did we not? An' we was makin' about twelve, ag'in' the monsoon—aye. That'd fetch her almost among them islands off Singapoor Strait, wouldn' it? But we know she'll not be that far—wi' monsoon an' sea ag'in' her! Well—there'll be nothin' to hit, short o' that, d'ye see!"

"Hmph! You know your charts an' navigatin'—I don't. But I do know she's not been doing twelve against the monsoon with all those tons of barnacles on her bottom—I could feel 'em crunch when she struck! How d'ye know 'twas one o' the Anamba rocks we sighted?"

"It could be nothin' else—could it? Off tha port side?"

"Oh, rot! At this end of the China Sea it might be fifty other islets! At all events, it's of no consequ'nce, because if she slides off this ledge, she'll fill an' go down—prob'ly before we'd get clear of her. Only thing to do, as I see it, is get all hands into the boats while it's comparatively smooth behind this reef, an' steer for Singapore. We couldn't miss a landfall one side of the Strait or the other if we tried, an' it'll not be so much over a hundred an' fifty miles, judging from our usual runs in these waters. Get everybody into the boats as soon as it's daylight unless your barometer shows a typhoon comin' up—put in plenty of provisions an' navigating instrum'nts—we should make Singapore in two days, I fancy, with steady pulling."

"Faith, it might be better to have a look-see for some island town near here—then we'd not be gettin' lost, d'ye see!"

"Both the Anambas and Natunas are Dutch—that would be throwin' the old girl into the Dutch courts besides delayin' us indefinitely. We'd have to say where she's lyin'—some o' them would be out to salvage the boat or cargo if they could! No, we'd best make Singapore an' let the agents or the Admir'lty take her over. They'll not expect a second mate an' engineers to stand by her in a case like this, when it's riskin' the lives of everyone on board!"

"Shouldn't we be sendin' wireless to Lloyd's?"

"If you know exactly where you are—aye. But you don't! And others will be pickin' up that report—keepin' an eye out for wrecks on every rock they pass. This reef may be in sight of passing craft two or three times a day—but from the way the charts look to me, it's a lot more likely to be sufficiently out o' the way for nobody to see her except an occasional Malay, fishin' from a catamaran—and they'll not be fishin' so much in forty fathom or more. Put it up to the Chief—see what he says."

McVey's Scotch thrift balked at the idea of abandoning the boat for some one else, possibly, to pick up and salvage—but the more he considered the situation, the more it looked like certain death for anyone to remain aboard with the chance of her sliding off on a high tide and going to the bottom.

When that hand started to go up, the Captain fired.

On the whole, he finally agreed that Pye's suggestion was the only practical one, and in the morning all hands were stowed in three of the boats with as much of their luggage as might safely be carried.

There was a drizzle of rain, but not so much wind, and the boats started off together with the intention of keeping in sight until a landfall was made—one of them commanded by McVey, who could steer by compass and read a chart even if he couldn't get an altitude with a sextant; the second by Pye—still rotten with fever and at times dazed by it; the third by Brady, who was now taking double the amount of his "medicine" every twelve hours—considerably slowed down in thinking or acting more than half the time. Half of the passengers were in the Chief's boat—the others supposed to be in Pye's or Brady's.

ON the third evening following, Colonel Gillespie of the Governor's staff and his friend Dr. Galt—an American physician well and favorably known throughout the Orient for his venturesome exploits—had strolled down Johnston's Pier from the Singapore Club, where Galt made his headquarters when ashore—smoking, enjoying the effect of the transient moonlight over the shipping at anchor inside the South Mole off Collyer Quay. Presently they noticed a boat crowded with people approaching the landing-steps.

The first man to come up the steps was evidently, by his uniform and faded gold sleeve-bands, an engineer. After a moment's hesitation, he approached the two—asking:

"Could ye tell me, now, whether there'll be ony sort o' a body in tha offeeces o' Mansfield an' Coomp'ny—oover yon, on tha Quay?"

"Aye, ye'll find a number of the office force on duty, I fancy, because one of the China Navigation boats is just warping alongside over in Keppel Harbor. Mansfield's are the agents, so they may keep open half the night. Are you consigned to them?"

The Colonel had answered the question because, as a Government officer, he had the run of most matters connected with the port; but Galt had been studying the engineer and his boatload with considerable interest.

"Not this trip, d'ye see—we cleared Hongkong tae Liverpool. But they'll be our owners' agents in this port, an' our naveegatin' officer put her on a reef out yon in tha China Sea."

"The devil! Rotten luck! What reef was it?"

"That, Ah dinna ken, sir. Ah'm tha engineer, but no naveegator. 'Twere tha second in charge o' her—tha master an' mate bein' dead—an' he's a puir feckless body a bit slow in his head. Mayhap he came in befoor us? Did he, so—wi' ain o' tha ither boats?"

"No. There has been no other re-

ported. How many got away when ye abandoned her?"

"Three, sir. Ma asseestant had tha ither —but he wair rotten wi coost-fever—a bit licht-haided, noo an' then."

"Are these passengers with you? How many of them?"

Galt was now sensing an absorbing interest which he couldn't quite manage to focus.

"There'll be seex in ma boot, sir. 'Tis supposed that Miss Lamberton an' her maid —Mr. Henson an' wife—Mr. Fisher an' his little lass—will be comin' in tha second boot, he bein' tha only naveegator, an' Pye bein' scarce able tae steer by coompass."

"Much water coming in when you abandoned her?"

"No sae verra mooch, sir—but gi'en high tide an' tha monsoon pushin', she's like tae slide off in thirrty or forrty fathom an' let in enough tae sink her."

"How long since you left that reef?"

"Saxty hoors—come foor bells."

"Pulling against the monsoon, of course? Any idea as to how many you've been making?"

"Aye. Ah threw some chips astern, timin' thim wi' ma watch, each day—morn an' nicht. Ah figure aboot a trifle oonder three knots, averagin' tha whole pull."

"What course were you steering?"

"Due sou'west, sir, wair tha coorse tha second gave me—an' Ah held tha boot tae that—Ah've had nae sleep in a' the saxty hoors. But our firrst landfa' wair Bentan Island, wi' which Ah wair fameeliar because o' tha Peak, some twelve hoondred feet above tha water. We sichted it aboot twa bells in tha afternoon, an' then bore norrth for tha entrance tae Singapoor Strait."

"Then the reef you struck would be approximately northeast from Bentan—a hundred and fifty or sixty miles?"

"Ah suppoose it would, sir—though Ah'll nae answer f'r such calculeetion, bein' more fameeliar wi' matters pertainin' tae tha receeprocatin' marine-engine. Weel—Ah suppose Ah can do nae better than tak' ma passenger-bodies an' crew tae the agents ontil Ah see what disposeetion they'll be makin' o' us."

The Colonel became helpful at this point.

"Go there yourself, man. I'll take your crew to the Master Attendant's office on the quay near Anderson Bridge. There is Governm'nt provision for quartering seafaring men in such circumst'nces. If your passengers managed to fetch off any of their funds or valuables, they'll find comfortable rooms at any of the hotels. Less expensive an' less comfortable boarding-houses if they prefer—but I fancy that your owners must refund the balance of passage-money to Liverpool an' will be liable for all hotel expenses until they do so. Get your people ashore, an' we'll send off the passengers in rickshaws, at once, to whatever hotels they decide upon. —Will ye be comin' along with my bunch, Doctor—or could ye just go with the passengers an' see them stowed where'er they wish?"

"Of course! I'll be glad to have all six of them dine with me at the Raffles and spin as much of the yarn as they care to when they're feeling better after a good dinner, with a few bottles of wine. And—I say, Colonel! Serve out a good meal with a few tots of grog to your bunch at my expense, will you? The poor devils ought to have a little something by way of evening up what they've just gone through. Eh? Afterward—come down to the Club and we'll compare notes."

WHEN later that evening Colonel Gillespie turned up at the club and found Dr. Galt in his room on an upper floor, studying one of the Admiralty charts, he was inclined to consider the affair more or less casually, and described the usual procedure in such cases.

"Of course the first action Governm'nt takes, d'ye see, is to send out general radio instructions to all craft at this end of the China Sea to insure their keepin' an eye out for those other two boats or any sign of the wreck. Probabilities are, from what the engineer an' crew say, that the boat has slid off that ledge an' gone to the bottom before this. Yet—bein' on the lee side of that bank with a strong monsoon blowin', it's possible enough that it may be some unfrequented corner where she may lie for years gettin' rusted and weather-stained an' covered with guano until unrecognizable as anything like a steamer unless one were close alongside of her. I consider that unlikely, however, because I can't understand how she could have gone sufficiently out of her course to strike a ledge where she'll not be seen within a few days if she's above water. As no fishin'-craft or steamer has reported her yet, it's a fairly safe bet she's gone down.

"Rather puzzlin', too, that neither of those other two boats have been reported! These waters are about as thick with all

sorts of craft as any locality in the world —an' if they were all steerin' sou'west, they'd be gettin' into waters where they're likely to be seen at any hour. Engineer says he might have been swamped a dozen times but for what one of the *khalasies* showed him about steerin' so's to keep bow-on to the nasty chop that was runnin' —he's a bit pessimistic about those other boats, if you awsk me! Says Pye really wasn't up to handlin' the one he had, under such conditions, an' he's fairly certain the second mate was an opium-addict."

"Oh, the devil! That's bad! From what the engineer and those passengers said, a dope-eater would have had his people under water the first day, in that chop-sea! And it was in the second mate's boat that Miss Lamberton and her maid are supposed to have left the wreck! Americans, they tell me—exceptionally bright and capable girl. Been with a big advertising concern in New York for several years before she started out for herself. Has a business of her own, now, handling national advertising accounts. Had been in London after one and then went out to Hongkong after another. Booked on the *Siberia* just to get an idea how the North Country owners run their boats, so that she can handle the account of a large Philadelphia shipping company and know what comparisons to draw in their publicity. By the way, Gillespie—it looks to me as though the underwriters are about the only ones in a case of this kind to write off any serious loss if the boat has actually gone to the bottom!"

"Aye—cargo would be a total loss, of course. Steamer also—unless they could prove criminal negligence of any sort against the owners, or statements with intent to defraud—"

"Isn't signing on a dope-addict as second mate criminal negligence?"

"Oh—aye, if ye can prove it! But it must be proved!"

"Well, the man was frequently noticed swallowing doses of a white powder, in a stealthy secretive sort of way. His brain and talk were noticeably more alert each time after taking it—and as noticeably sluggish at other times—man half-crazed with nerves besides. Those are almost unmistakable symptoms of morphine or heroin."

"Also general symptoms of chronic indigestion an' disordered liver—not? Chap told some of 'em that's what his trouble was, an' that the powders were a doctor's prescription—showed a prescription-label once or twice. Who's to prove he lied?"

"I—for one—if I talk with him five minutes! Seems to me we should notify Lloyd's that there is serious doubt as to this man's capacity—suggest that they pay no claims until the point is cleared up."

"An'—if the chap turns up missing—unquestionably dead?"

"Then I'd contest any claim on the ground that there was something criminally wrong with the mate or he never would have killed the master in a shooting-scrape —thereby eliminating the only competent navigators aboard."

"Hmph! I'd not thought of that! The point seems to me well taken—in fact, I'll get sworn statem'nts from the engineer an' passengers, although they know nothing whatever as to how the trouble started. There was a Parsee or Hindu passenger went overboard one rainy night, too."

"ASIDE from what may or may not be proved in that direction, what is the usual course in a case like this?" asked Galt then.

"There'll be no usual course—each case differing in some way from others. But we can form a general idea, I fancy. First place, unless the owners send out a wrecking-tug to search for her an' possibly salve the boat, within a specified time, she becomes the property of the underwriters—the moment they pay one penny of claims, they own her anyhow. Sendin' out a tug an' crew means considerable expense—in this case likely to be a wild-goose chase with no result, or else finding her where salvage would cost more'n she's worth. Not likely they'd send out a tug without knowin' exactly where she is an' in what condition. If salved by other parties, the underwriters must pay salvage an' towing —all expenses. If found afloat by a Governm'nt patrol, a derelict, they'd wireless in to ascertain if salvage would be paid. If not, they sink her. With all these considerations, it's obviously good business for the underwriters to get rid of the responsibility at the earliest possible moment, for pretty much anything they can get, an' then write off the loss on claims. In such case the boat is ordered sold at auction—wherever found, in whatever condition; an' there's never a lack of bidders at small amounts, because thousands of pounds are sometimes made by speculators willing to

take the chance. As a matter of fact, there'll be a deal of cablin' to owners tomorrow morning—Lloyd's agents, here, will be conferrin'—sendin' a cable or so to the London office. If owners put in their claims at once an' turn her over, I fancy the underwriters may offer her at auction the same afternoon—as every hour they wait brings a risk that she may be found an' the question of salvage come up. They'll not care to pay more'n the insurance if they can avoid it."

"H-m-m—I'm kind of a gambler myself, at times—made money—and lost some too. If you'll take me to that auction just before the bidding starts, and I feel like taking a flyer, I'll pay you a commission of twenty pounds when the boat is legally turned over to me. You know the procedure—I don't. I'll rely upon you to see that my title is clear."

"I don't accept commissions from my friends, Doctor. But I don't object to makin' a sportin' proposition—considerin' that I cawn't afford to gamble, myself, upon anything which may run to a stiffish amount before I'm through with it. I'll not only take you to that auction, if held, but I fancy a word or two from me to the agents, here, may insure her bein' put up—so that I'll promise you a chance to bid if you desire. Then—it's understood between us that I pay five per cent of whatever expense you incur relatin' to this particular boat, an' receive from you five per cent of whatever profit you may happen to make. Fair—is it not?"

"Entirely so, as far as I can see. I'm satisfied if you are!"

WHEN the Colonel left the club, Galt spent another hour or two going over the Admiralty chart in his room with a pair of parallel-rulers, dividers and a transparent compass-card with a black string fastened to its center to give any desired bearing. McVey had steered due S.W. and made Bentan Island—but had made no allowance for the monsoon drift forcing his boat eastward from that line, so that a straight N.E. course from Bentan must be several miles east of the ledge where the *Siberia* lay. The Doctor was now practically certain that he knew where the steamer actually was—if above water. That was his only serious risk.

Next day no surprise was felt at the underwriters' decision to cut a loss before it could be increased to any serious extent. They told the owners that they were deferring payment a few weeks until all the available information was in, but were selling the wreck for anything it might bring. As they were among the solidest institutions in the British Empire—perfectly good for all claims against them—this was entirely satisfactory to the owners. Galt bid her in at four that afternoon for the modest sum of five hundred pounds—his highest competitor not caring to go above four hundred, and being congratulated by friends upon letting the "crazy American" have it. Not one of them believed he had an undertaker's chance for seeing a penny of his five hundred again.

NEXT morning the Doctor took a launch out to the naval base for a talk with a young friend in the Service—a lieutenant attached to the aviation department of the station, who had been under great obligations to him.

"Harry, I suppose you've no serious objection to increasing your pay a bit with extra money if you get it without incurring any risk—say a hundred pounds? Eh?"

"I fancy you'll listen deuced hard, Doctor—if you hear any!"

"Is there a hydroplane in commission which you happen to be trying out at present? I don't mean one that may go to pieces with us in the air, but one you've flown enough to be sure of it. Eh?"

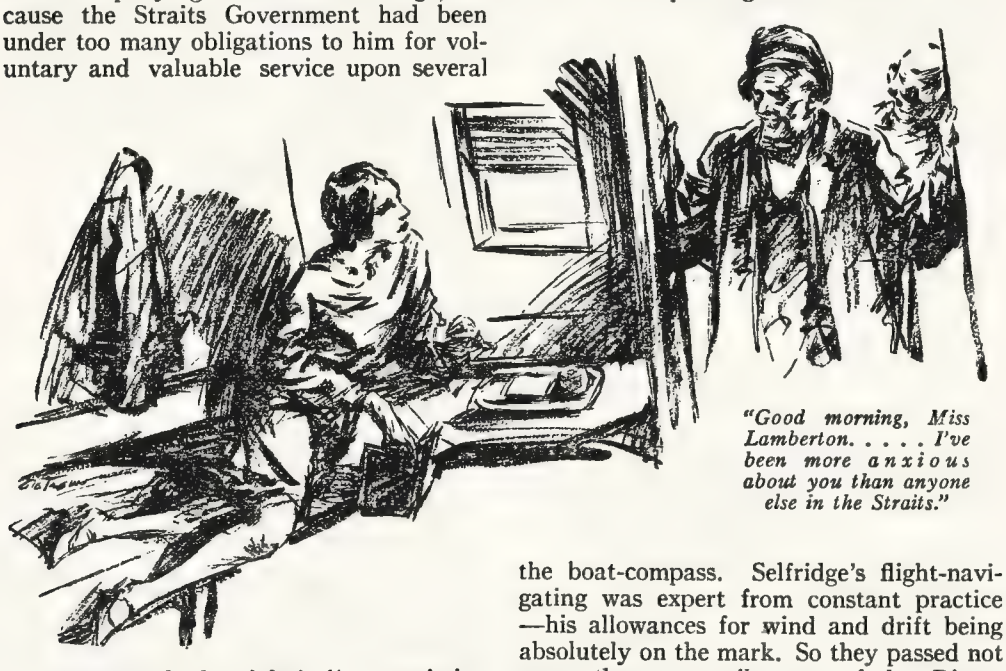
"Aye—there's a bus I take up for two or three hours every decent flyin' day—continuous-service test for her motor. Stanch little two-seater—center of gravity low enough to prevent tail-spinnin'. Would you care to go up with me?"

"If you can get official permission for taking me up on a three- or four-hour test-flight,—and are willing to keep your mouth shut concerning everything we may happen to see,—you get five twenty-pound notes before we take off. I'll make it ten, if you think it should be that much. What do you think of the weather, anyhow? Safe to go up?"

"Aye—if we take enough gas for twelve hours or more, in case of fog or rain-mist delayin' our comin' down. I'll be glad to have you, Doctor, without a penny of consideration—the cats know I owe a demmed sight more than that to you. But if you're really keen about bein' a 'protector of the poor,' the hundred quid'll be more than sufficient. The glass is about twenty-nine inches—inclined to rise a bit, if anything

—so there's no typhoon within six hours of us at least. May get showers or mist but no heavy rain until four or after. Could you go up at once? The next four hours are likely to be the clearest we'll get. As for blabbin' of anything, I fancy you may trust me."

Galt anticipated no official objections to his accompanying Lieutenant Selfridge, because the Straits Government had been under too many obligations to him for voluntary and valuable service upon several occasions—and the Admiral's permission was most cordially given.



"Good morning, Miss Lamberton. . . . . I've been more anxious about you than anyone else in the Straits."

Giving the course as due N.E. from the naval station, Galt watched the clock on the instrument-board in front of Selfridge for an hour and fifteen minutes — then pushed the goggles up on his helmet and began sweeping the horizon, ahead, through powerful prism-binoculars. In a moment or two he distinctly made out the rocks of the Anamba group rising from the water—inside of five minutes, they were distinctly visible without the glasses. A code of signal-touches upon the pilot's shoulder had been arranged between them, as conversation was out of the question—but feeling none, the Lieutenant, knowing exactly where he was, supposed his passenger wished to go on as far as the Natunas or beyond. His eyes were constantly studying the horizon and the sky for weather indications—what happened to be underneath was a lesser consideration during the wet monsoon. But he considered it natural enough for the Doctor to peer down over the side of the cockpit with his binoculars at the Anambas, with their surrounding rocks and reefs, as they passed over them. Such things were always an interesting sight to a landsman.

Galt's calculations—he was really a very good navigator—had been exceedingly close, based upon what he'd heard from some of the passengers who had sat near the boat-compass. Selfridge's flight-navigating was expert from constant practice —his allowances for wind and drift being absolutely on the mark. So they passed not more than two miles east of the Rittan ledge while Selfridge's eyes were fixed upon the two larger islands a few miles north of it—the plane being five thousand feet up.

The Doctor had no difficulty in making out the shape of the *Siberia* without the binoculars—her bow almost out of water and the turtle-deck, aft, just awash. Through the glasses, however, he not only made out the Union Jack flying from the fore-truck, union-down,—which he couldn't remember having been mentioned by any of the passengers,—but also what he at first took to be a pair of B. V. D.'s hanging from one of the davit-guys on the boat-deck. Two long flesh-colored stockings hanging from another guy, however, made him revise this impression and do considerable speculating upon the wonderful things in heaven and earth.

After circling the Natunas, they headed straight back for Singapore, so far east of the Anamba group that they didn't sight them again. When they came down and Selfridge innocently told his passenger

what islands they had passed over, the Doctor shook his head derisively.

"You're balmy, old chap—quite balmy! What we saw were a few islands off the Borneo coast, and others in the Straits as we circled back. I'm positive of it!"

For a second or two the color flamed into the young fellow's cheeks—he took his navigation and professional work quite seriously. Then—he saw the point, and chuckled.

"Right you are, Doctor! Oh—quite so! Coast of Borneo and *beaucoup* islands it was! Must have been! I'm on, sir!"

The following morning Galt and his devoted China boy started off by themselves with a fortnight's supply of provisions in a fast power-launch with enough beam—skimming-dish model—to be reasonably safe in any seas they were likely to strike; and by midnight they had sighted the Anamba Light—west of them. Keeping it in that position, they turned the launch bow to the wind, with a spar-kedge astern to hold her that way, and rode drifting until daylight, when they ran down to where the *Siberia* lay. The Doctor had told Ling Foh that there was at least one woman on board, and the Cantonese grinningly pointed to a small American flag flying above the Union Jack at the fore-truck—both reversed.

"Good girl! She's no fool! Now I know who she is—nice little question of salvage, too. This boat hasn't been abandoned at all, Ling!"

PAYING out their kedge astern of the launch, they climbed aboard over the turtle-deck and gave her ten fathoms more line—then crossed the after well-deck and climbed to the saloon gangway. Curled up in a corner of the starboard transom was a very attractive girl in serviceable blue serge—reading a book—taking an occasional bite from a tray of food at her side.

"Good morning, Miss Lamberton! Being myself American—Richmond and New York—I think I've been more anxious about you than anyone else in the Straits. You see, they all suppose that you went off in Brady's boat, which hasn't been heard from. If what has been hinted about Brady is true, he's undoubtedly gone to the bottom with all hands. Pye also, I fear. McVey got safely in. . . . . Oh—I beg your pardon! I'm Galt—medico. And this is my Canton boy Ling Foh—you'll find him straight goods—all through."

"Not the Doctor Galt who's been having such exciting adventures in these waters—consorting with governors, sultans, rajahs—and incidentally rendering rather valuable political services when he'd no other affair on hand? They mention your name rather frequently in Hongkong—and I suppose in most of the other ports."

"Oh, a lot of that is bunk, you know—mustn't pay any attention to it! Now—I notice this boat was never 'abandoned.' You're in charge—which prevents anyone else salving her without your permission—and I think you would legally share in the salvage if they did, though I don't know just how the courts would consider that. I happen to be the present owner—bid her in at the underwriters' auction—so whatever business arrangement you suggest is between us and nobody else. What's your idea?"

"Anything you suggest, Doctor—and I'm tickled pink to know a fellow-countryman is owner! Frankly, I'm afraid my position wasn't so good. I was going to radio for a wrecking-tug and finance the operations up to about five thousand—that's as far as I'd gamble on any boat in this one's position. But I found it impossible to get up steam until the boat is on a more level keel, so there was no running the dynamos. Batteries completely down—no electrolytic solution that I can find—no sulphuric acid that I could be sure of. On top of that, I don't know where we are within a hundred-mile radius, or more—couldn't even have given an approximate position if the radio had been available. Chow enough for six months—barnacles too thick to let the boat slide off into deep water—I got soundings from the turtle-deck and they made me shiver a bit. Forty-five fathoms, sheer—though the lead may have just hit a crevice. Think I could have worked the life-raft off the top of the Captain's cabin, but I wouldn't have risked leaving on it in this sea. Were you in that bus that passed up yonder, day before yesterday?"

"Yes—and knew you were aboard when I saw the clothes-line."

"Hmph! Lucky you were too far away to be critical. Did they tell you about the captain and mate killing each other? About the mysterious disappearance of our Hindu passenger and his superstition concerning rooms?"

"Only sketchily—most of the detail left out because they evidently didn't know it—but enough to start a train of speculation

in my mind, knowing Orientals as well as I do. That was my chief reason for bidding the boat in. Suppose you tell me everything you've noticed or speculated upon since leaving Hongkong?"

SHE did this very carefully, with her own side-lights upon it—but quite evidently hadn't stumbled upon any sort of key to the mystery.

"You think your Parsee or Hindu really believed what he told you in regard to his superstition about Room Number Eight, or Stateroom H?" asked Galt. "Was nothing concealed behind that?"

"Well, once or twice it seemed to me there might have been something nobody guessed—but I could visualize nothing that wouldn't be too ridiculous for—"

"Yet that brute of a mate evidently figured it out—killed the Hindu, chucked him over the side, and was rummaging about his room when the Captain caught him. They killed each other over that mysterious secret. Six years ago there was a story going the rounds out here concerning a wealthy Punjabi, identity never known, who did book on this boat in Stateroom H and mysteriously disappeared one night. She was then registered as the *Cyrenea*—owned by Jephson Brothers, of Newcastle. Suppose we go up and have a look at that room? No need to bother with the Hindu's luggage if it's still there, because the mate went through it and found nothing."

When they unlocked the door and went in, Galt stood in the center and slowly turned about until he had glanced searchingly at every nook and corner of the room. Then he placed everything movable outside in the social-hall, leaving nothing but the bare planking of deck, bulkheads, transom and berths. After gently running his finger along every crack between the planking, he next examined a small ventilator-pipe which passed up one corner of the room through deck and ceiling. A moment's reflection sent him below to examine the ceiling of the mess-saloon, directly underneath. There was no hole in it under Stateroom H—but the riveting indicated that a new plate had been substituted in that spot at some previous time, as if a former system of ventilation had been discarded for one reason or another. Back in the stateroom, he saw that the bottom of the pipe was held in place by a metal ring screwed to the deck-planking, but evidently not fastened to the pipe. Clasping both arms around the pipe and bracing his feet, Galt pulled upward with all his strength, and the pipe crunchingly telescoped up into a slightly larger section above. On the planking in the center of where the bottom of the pipe had rested was a square something which proved to be an ebony box, thickly caked with dust. Replacing the pipe as it had been originally, they locked the door again and took the casket down to the saloon, where they emptied its contents upon the crimson cushion of the starboard transom—a scintillating, iridescent, dazzling mass of unset rubies, sapphires, opals, diamonds and pearls. A rajah's family treasure, it might have been—but there was no possibility of tracing or proving rightful ownership.

THEY looked at each other and grinned—rather exhaustedly.

"Ling Foh ought to have a tenth, don't you think?"

"Sure ought! Make it more if you like!"

"Then we split—fifty-fifty? Eh?"

"Nope! I'm not hogging what doesn't belong to me—this was your pidgin, absotive-ly! I'll take whatever cargo a wrecking-tug can salve from her—you get the boat if she can be floated without sinking."

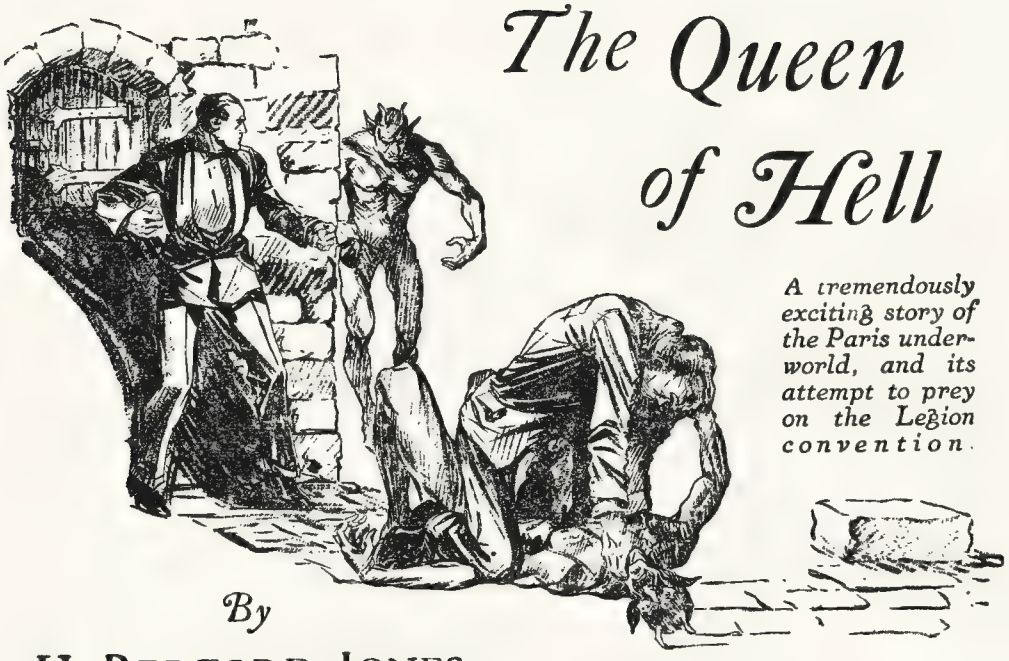
"Nothing doing! Colonel Gillespie of the Governor's staff gets five per cent for seeing me through that auction, and Lieutenant Selfridge ought to have a little cut—help him immensely—young wife and two nice kids. That was his bus I was in the other day. No—we lump the whole proposition—boat, salvage and treasure. Then we deduct these little cuts and divide what's left, fifty-fifty. Make us both independent for life, you know."

"Seems rather a pity to put us both in such a ritzy position, don't you think? Take all the spice out of life! I was getting quite fascinated with the game of national advertising—it's no cinch. And it'll be tough on you to be above all need for hair-raising adventures any more."

"Nothing to prevent our sending your surviving fellow-passengers wherever they want to go in the finest accommodations we can book for 'em and give the crew five hundred each, if we feel like blowing a fraction of this in that way. That's merely a sample of many uses we can put it to. And it wont make much difference in what either of us has been doing. Hereafter I'm thinking of buying wrecks for investment—not speculation."

The Queen of Hell

A tremendously exciting story of the Paris underworld, and its attempt to prey on the Legion convention.



In a flying leap Holly had him by the throat. "Get the other one, Buddy!" he cried. "Quick!"

By

H. BEDFORD-JONES

Illustrated by Paul Lehman

"DID you ever hear of Le Néant?" asked Hollock, as we sat down to luncheon.

"The nothingness?" I translated bitterly. "Yes. That's us, right here and now, in this lovely city of Paris. Damn Paris!"

"Huh!" Holly merely grunted. "This is an excellent omelet, anyway. I'm all right again."

"And the American Legion is in convention," I said. "And Tellier's in Belgium. Damn Tellier!"

"My dear Barnes, damn all the world if you like, but give me some more omelet!" said Holly.

I was grouchy, and Hollock, beneath the surface, was deeply chagrined. We had some excuse, too.

Every member of the American Legion who could possibly raise the money had come to the convention in Paris. The A. E. F. was in France to have a good time. And the Paris police found themselves up against it, for they had to make the underworld safe for democracy. The Legion is a bunch of very human men, plenty of them had money to burn, and there are always fools in every crowd. So the Continental gangsters were all out to pluck the visitors, and the head and brains of the plucking was Tellier—once a French officer, now the leader of the craftiest criminal outfit in Europe.

Hollock, war ace, Morocco flyer, commandant in the French aviation and a few other things, was privately and unofficially acting for the government in trying to cut short Tellier's activities. He and I and Alice Vincent did a few things, too—but Tellier dropped out of sight after we learned too much about him. Alice was in Brussels now, trying to get some trace of him. We had pretty well smashed his organization, also.

The previous evening, Holly and I had been neatly trapped. We got out of the trap alive, by a narrow margin, found that Tellier was certainly in Belgium, found that if we did not get him quickly, he or his outfit would certainly get us—and were blocked. Holly, doped and nearly drowned in the Seine, was unable to travel at once. We could not get off for Brussels until he got a few hours of sleep and rest. So we waited over a day.

"Cheer up, Buddy Barnes!" said Holly, grinning at me. He was a trifle bald, quiet and always well poised, with keen gray eyes and nothing else to show what he really was. "Midnight tonight will see us off. Tellier is in Bruges, the Belgian police are only too happy to work with us, and all's well. Bruges is a fine place

to hide in, but an awful place to get away from! So you never heard of Le Néant?"

"Some place in Bruges?" I demanded. He chuckled.

"No—Montmartre. Look at this."

HE showed me a letter, which must have come on the noon post. It was a scrawl in French, poorly spelled, wretchedly written on the back of a wine-bill. It bore no address, and only a letter for signature.

> Dear Sir:
> Seven tonight, Le Néant. Four Americans and wives. There are preparations. The Queen of Hell herself appears for the last time. Le Néant was sold yesterday. Tonight is a coup. Your face is known from photographs, so be careful.

"What's all this rigmarole?" I demanded, handing back the note. Hollock laughed.

"Well, Le Néant, which means 'The Nothingness,' is a shudder-joint for tourists and students; it's built around the old underground chapel of the Capucines, and the show is rather clever. There have been numerous complaints about it, so some months ago a police spy was put on the job. He's doorkeeper now—this same Mr. T. The Queen of Hell, as she's called, is known more simply as La Reine—she's the owner of the joint. She is also, as it happens, the sweetheart of our friend Tellier."

"Eh!" I sat up at this. "So that's it!"

"Quite so," returned Holly. "Let's read between the lines. Four Americans and their wives, or women, are to be there tonight for dinner. They, or certain ones, are delegates to the convention whom Tellier has singled out as easy marks, fat birds for plucking. One or two may have their wives, the others may have companions—no telling.

"La Reine is making certain preparations to pull off a big coup, and then skip out in a hurry—undoubtedly to join Tellier. She has sold Le Néant; makes her last appearance tonight. What does this mean? That she takes the midnight express and lands in Belgium in the morning—before any complaints to the police, with the necessary investigation, would stop the frontiers for her. No passports are needed for Belgium, remember!

"Further, you and I are known to Tellier's gang, by sight. Our friend T. can pass us in all right if we want to put on some false galleghers. So there you are."

"Huh!" I said. "Why not put it up to the cops and leave it go at that? I've had enough of this sweet gang of hop-heads, junkers, crooks in general!"

Holly lighted a cigarette, and I read the look in his eye. A few hours previously, he had all but gone west, and did not forget it. Instead of resting up until midnight, as we had planned, and turning over this information to the police, he wanted to mix in it himself and get home a last blow at Tellier's outfit.

"This Tellier affair, Buddy, is really in my hands," he rejoined. "That's why T. sent this note to me, instead of to the prefecture. We don't need evening dress at this joint; we can send our bags to the station, go to Le Néant at seven, and have five hours to see the show and make our train. There'll be time, you may be sure—because La Reine undoubtedly figures on making that train herself."

"Then the obvious thing," I objected, "is to nab her at the station."

Holly looked at me and smiled. "Cold feet, Buddy?"

"Yes, damn it!" I said with energy. "You and your frog police system give me a pain. You know we're up against a pack of killers—outlaws every one—and you want to run your fool head right into the noose to see the fun! I don't. I'm a sensible man. I want to live another six months at least, long enough to marry Alice Vincent and get back to where a man can live to a ripe old age if he doesn't die from synthetic gin or gangsters or autos or something. You want to see that show tonight, that's the trouble with you!"

"So do you," said Holly. "It's agreed, then. We'll go."

A LIGHT drizzle of summer rain was falling that afternoon, which rendered the disguise Holly adopted for us a rather simple matter. He got two of the flat and wide-brimmed black hats affected by lower-class Parisians, and two light rain-capes with hoods turned back over the shoulder, and two sets of false whiskers to fasten on with spirit gum. They were rude whiskers, and would not have passed muster under brilliant light, but promised to serve our purpose well enough.

We took our bags to the station, left

them, got our accommodations on the night express, and taxied back to the boulevards. Le Néant was located in the maze of ancient buildings between the Palais Royale and Montmartre—old structures huddled in tiny streets unchanged since the days of d'Artagnan, it seemed. While in the taxi, we applied our false beards, and when we alighted, half a block from our destination, the chauffeur stared at us in blank amazement, and not a little suspicion.

"You've a few *gendarmes* scattered around?" I said to Holly, as we started down the street afoot. He shook his head.

"No. It's up to us purely, old chap. No telling what will happen in there—we don't want to scare off the birds. At the worst, we can waylay the lady at the station, but the main thing is to have some fun."

"Fun!" I echoed bitterly. "I've had enough fun of this kind to last me a while."

"I notice," he said dryly, "you loaded up those toy pocket-pistols of yours."

I disdained to answer him. We headed for an electric light above a narrow doorway—a sign in the shape of a skull and cross-bones, without any reading matter. No lighted windows appeared—merely the open, dark entrance. As we came toward it, we both halted abruptly. Two taxis were drawing up at the curb, and an American voice spoke out.

"Here we are, Wilberforce! Pile out."

"Get on in ahead," muttered Holly. "Remember that name?"

I DID. It was one we had found in Tellier's notes—his "sucker list." We had not been able to trace this Wilberforce, for he was not a regular delegate to the convention, but being probably a wealthy wastrel, had come on his own. Mention of the name showed we were on the right track and no mistake.

The open doorway led us into a long and absolutely blank hall, lighted by a flickering blue flame, and showing a door ahead, closed, upon it limned a skull in phosphorescent paint. A feeling of irritation seized me at all this mummery, since I had no use for shudder-provokers. I had had plenty of shivers lately without adding mockery to the score. However, I was destined for a new thrill tonight, had I but known it.

Holly knocked at the door. It was opened by a tall, black-masked man, garbed in solid black, with black gloves. He peered at us, eyes glittering behind his visor.

"Unhappy pilgrims, ye seek death! Pay the hangman's fee, then, and enter. Five francs."

Holly handed over the money. The doorman gestured to another door far ahead, at the end of another long corridor.

"Knock twice," he said. Holly said a low word, and he nodded.

"My compliments." And his voice was ironic. "I think it's plain robbery ahead—but who knows? I'm not in their secrets. Go on."

This was obviously the police spy "T." We passed down the corridor, found a knocker in the shape of a skull on the door ahead, and banged it twice.

"Enter!" exclaimed a sepulchral voice, as the door swung open.

WE stumbled down two or three steps and stood blinking, while a chorus of voices arose at us. A room showed large, with a chandelier of bones bearing four skulls in which flickered tiny lights, while other tiny lights showed around, but for the moment we could make out no details. Then the jeering voices made themselves felt.

"Two nice fat corpses!" yelled somebody.

"Pipe the beards!" cried another. "Whiskers wont go in the coffin—cut 'em off!"

Amid the uproar, a man appeared before us, all in black, and his voice came in deep and sepulchral tones:

"Unhappy mortals, select your coffins!"

Hollock caught my arm—for he had, undoubtedly, been in this or in another such place ere now—and I let him guide me to a bench, before a table. Then I saw that the table was really a coffin, on which were covers for two, with two tiny candles of black wax. Through the obscurity crept sight of other coffins roundabout, and of faces—laughing, curious, bored patches of pallor in the gloom Drinks were served in miniature skull-cups.

"Cheap tourist theatricals!" I muttered, and saw Holly, beside me, grinning.

"Have you any last requests to make? Anyone to mourn you?" murmured a voice, and between us appeared an un-

The crowd clustered on the stairs; the door opened—we had reached the gate of hell.

dertaker's assistant—the waiter. We ordered the "fixed price" dinner, and he departed.

At this instant fresh babel uprose all around. The door opened, to admit four men and four women—our four Legionaries and their friends. They halted, as we had done, blinded and confused. Accustomed by this time to the lack of light, I sized them up, as witticisms and shouts were hurled at them. Two were evidently accompanied by their wives, the others as evidently by visiting flappers seeing Paris for the first time. All were expensively dressed, and were tourists of very obvious type, out for a good time regardless of expense, and having it. It was evident that both men and women had been patronizing the jewelers of the Rue de la Paix; they were in evening attire, extremely modish except for the jewelry. "Any warnings in order?" I murmured to Holly, but he shrugged.

"I'm not interested in warnings, Buddy. Besides, they'll get most of it back," he added cynically.

The noise died down, except that made by the eight, for whom places had been reserved. They were all loud talkers, beaming around good-humoredly, anxious to show off and make their reckless expenditure noticed. They made enough noise over the charnel-house decorations for a score, and settled down before their coffins amid delighted screams from the ladies and boisterous comments from the men. Champagne was evidently in order, and it soon came.

Our dinner came, too, and we found it very good. Holly and I said little, not wishing to advertise ourselves as bearded Americans, for my French was abominable. Save for the gloom and the funereal waiters, there was little of interest in the place—most of the guests were tourists, a few were French, and three or four men I suspected of being planted by the management. Wilberforce, the leading light of the visiting party, was loud enough but had nothing very bad in evidence and none of them drank to excess. With all this, I began to wonder where the trick came in and what it could be, since the evening's thrills had apparently ended. There I was wrong. The dinner cost forty francs a head—just the charge of the Royal Monceau, which sets the best table in Paris—and the thrills included something better than a skull and coffin.

Coffee was served at all the tables simultaneously, and the sepulchral-voiced man in black announced that in ten minutes the descent to hell would take place, and La Reine herself would meet her guests. Wine was finished, cigarettes were lighted, and anticipation filled the air. Amid the outburst of talk follow-

ing the announcement, Holly jogged my knee, and I saw the same four men, whom I had suspected of being house-men, quietly slipping away into the shadows.

THE ten minutes fled quickly. The announcer appeared, this time clad in devil's garb, tail, horns and all, while a red glare of light opened up on him. He summoned all present to follow him to the lower regions, in a pseudo-solemn speech that drew roars of applause; then he flung open a door near us, which emitted a dim red radiance.

"Get in first," said Holly curtly, as benches were shoved back.

We had no trouble reaching the door ahead of the crowd, which waited for others to lead the way as crowds do. The devil motioned us with his pitchfork, and we went down a long descending corridor, then a flight of old stone stairs, all lighted by the invisible red glare. At the bottom a door barred our way, and we waited for the others to reach us. The passage, all of ancient stones, and the old massive iron-bound door, were obviously no fake.

"The old chapel of the Capucines," muttered Holly. "Once in, follow me."

The devil mustered his flock down the steps to us, struck the door with his fork, and uttered a rolling invocation to the Queen of Hell. Looking back, I could see the crowd all clustered on the stairs, Wilberforce and his party in the lead, directly behind us. Then, abruptly, the red light snapped out, and as stifled shrieks went up at the sudden darkness, the door ahead opened.

We had reached the gate of hell.

I heard the voice of Wilberforce behind me, in the dark.

"Rats! I've heard of this joint and what they do," he said. "And I've been tipped off how they do it, too! You let 'em give me a chance, and—"

The rest was lost, but I had caught enough. Past doubt, each of the four victims had been privately tipped off to something, and they would certainly be given a chance to show what they knew. It remained to be seen what the game could be.

Holding Hollock's sleeve, I followed him blindly until he brought up short and halted. We stood in an ancient crypt or chapel, small and semi-circular in shape, lighted only by one huge six-foot crimson taper set in the hand of a skeleton. The vaulted stone roof, the tombstones in the floor, the dim walls, were all so obviously genuine that silence fell on everyone and laughter was hushed. The place was impressive beyond words.

Against the center of the straight wall facing us, where I suppose had once been an altar, was a small and narrow platform. On this platform, upright against the stone wall, stood four stone coffins. Each sarcophagus was shaped like a mummy-case—that is, to the form of the body. They stood side by side. On the right of this platform was a life-size statue of a scarlet woman, of remarkable beauty, whose chief attire consisted of jewels that glinted and scintillated in the soft candle-glow. To the left, out three feet from the wall, was a massive, eight-foot tombstone set on end—and Holly had led me here to the left, at the edge of the crowd, close to this tombstone.

With his party arranged facing the four large stone coffins, the devil pointed to the statue.

"Behold the image of La Reine d'Enfer!" he boomed out. Then his fork pointed at the coffins. "Behold the fate awaiting four victims—four of you, devoted pilgrims! Upon four of you La Reine herself will expend her direst torments. But the queen comes. Out with the light!"

On this timely warning, he reached up with his fork and extinguished the candle.

NOTHING stirred—except the audience, who drew closer together and shivered in the dense blackness. Now, if ever, I thought, is the time; yet nothing happened. Then two imps appeared close beside us, brandishing flickering greenish lights—they had come from behind the huge tombstone, I saw. They danced across the platform and back, extinguished their lights, gave one eerie yell, and were gone. It was grotesque, and this time the blackness drew exclamations and soft cries from the crowd to our right.

Sudden silence fell. Imperceptibly, a subtle scarlet radiance grew and grew, a soft sound of music was faintly heard, and died away again. The dim red light increased, yet came from nowhere and only faintly illumined the pallid faces—it gathered and held about the statue of La Reine. It grew clearer, brighter; abruptly, the statue moved.

She stood there before us, almost in

An imp appeared bearing a cup of liquid fire. With a gesture the queen drank it.

scarlet nudity, jewels flashing, a smile on her lips. Applause broke forth and she smiled afresh, then held out a jeweled wand and touched it to the floor. In the most approved stage fashion, sparks flew, a bell rang, and an imp appeared bearing a golden cup of liquid fire. With a gesture the queen held it to her lips and drank it off.

I heard Wilberforce grunt skeptically, significantly.

"Ladies and gentlemen, my guests," said La Reine, in slightly accented English, "I demand four victims! Four among you must volunteer, must sacrifice yourselves for all. You shall drink the fire of hell, you shall submit to torments, you shall give yourselves that the others may return to the upper world. And I shall smile upon you—me!"

A speech she had learned by note, obviously, and as obviously meant for certain ones in her audience. They took the bait promptly.

"Bring on your hellfire!" exclaimed Wilberforce, as all glanced one at another. He took a step forward, laughing. "I'm game for it! Come on, Jim."

One of his companions followed, was jerked back by his wife, but pulled free.

"Close to hell as we'll ever come, boys!" he cried. "Come on, make a party of it!"

La Reine came to Wilberforce, took his hand, smiled into his eyes. For all her red paint or powder, she was beautiful enough to turn any fool's head.

"You care not what happens?" she demanded.

"Not a damned care!" exclaimed Wilberforce, laughing again. "I'm from Texas, where we eat fire and brimstone every day and have cyclones for dessert; so bring it on!"

LA REINE whirled, struck the floor, brought out a shower of sparks. The red glare grew brighter. An imp appeared, with the golden cup full of blue flames. He darted forth from behind the tombstone, where I now knew a doorway must be hidden, and rushed to Wilberforce with the cup. Wilberforce seized it from him.

"Here's luck, and brimstone all around!" he cried—and drank it.

He did the trick well, too, for a novice, blowing out the flames of the brandy as the cup touched his lips, and emptying it. He had wanted applause, and he got it full measure. Before the shouts and voices died out, three other imps appeared. The other three men, who had joined him, attempted the trick as they had obviously been tipped off to it.

Two of them managed it, clumsily, the third failed, burned his lips, spilled the blazing stuff over himself, and broke into curses. The imps yelled and dashed out the flames, and the crowd went into roars of laughter, applause and mockery. Then the imps departed, and the red glare died away, changed, melted into a ghastly

bluish radiance, thin and most horrible in its effects—on all save La Reine.

She, by what trick I know not, lost her scarlet hue and became apparently herself, slender, graceful, white-bodied, jewels glittering with new fires.

"You have drunk the fires of hell!" she cried in a rather shrill voice. "Now the torments await you—prepare! Approach your coffins, stand before them!"

WITH sheepish grins, but nothing loath to shine before the audience, the four men mounted to the low platform and stood in front of the coffins. The ghastly bluish light slowly died out until it was a mere suggestion, a thin and effervescent radiance very dimly lighting the coffins and the four men there, and the glowing figure of La Reine. Two imps appeared, bearing a burden of white clothes. The queen pointed to Wilberforce, and they came to him, ordered his hands down at his sides, and began to wrap him from neck to heels in white sheeting. They moved rapidly, with grotesque motions—all very dimly seen.

"Looks like I'm done for this time," observed Wilberforce jovially.

Holly touched my arm. Every eye was fastened upon the platform, and we moved silently to the edge of the tombstone, unobserved in the gloom. Behind it appeared a narrow opening—another corridor, faintly lighted, and curtained. The curtain was held ajar by a third imp, who suddenly darted out to the platform. He came back again, and we drew away lest he see us.

"We've got 'em!" whispered Holly at my ear. "Quick, now—when he goes to the platform, duck in there—no, wait! Let him get all of it first."

I waited, mystified, but asking no questions. Wilberforce was wrapped in white and placed in his coffin, back to the wall. He winked out at the audience, as the imps began swathing the second man in turn.

"Four good men gone to hell!" he said, and there was a laugh. His voice was thick, however. I remembered he had downed a cup of brandy, on top of the champagne he had already drunk—so had the others, or two of them. Was it brandy alone, or with a stick of dope in it? Next moment my suspicions were justified, as the imps came to the third man.

"He has not drunk the fire!" cried out the queen shrilly. "He is unworthy of knowing the delights of hell! Another cup for him—quickly!"

Laughter and jeers went up, and the unhappy victim, with his American sense of having to do what everyone else did, boldly demanded another chance. The cup was brought. This time he had better luck than before, and downed the stuff very neatly. More applause, and the two imps went to work on him. Again the third imp darted out, and watching him narrowly in the ghastly gloom, I saw him take something from the other two and dart back to shelter.

"Ready, now—that's three of 'em fixed!" said Holly.

He drew slowly to the edge of the big tombstone. As the third man was put in his coffin and the two imps began wrapping the fourth, amid a running fire of jests from the crowd, the curtain of the little door was again pulled aside and the third imp stood there, waiting, back to us, eyes on the platform. When he moved, Holly was gone like a flash, and I followed him, through the curtain, into the empty corridor beyond.

Six feet from us, to the right, was an open doorway, whence came the light. Holly slipped into it, with me at his heels. And the fourth imp was there to meet us.

He leaped up before us, but he had no chance to shout. Holly was on him in a flying leap, had him by the throat, and went down on top of him.

"Get the other one, Buddy!" he cried. "Quick!"

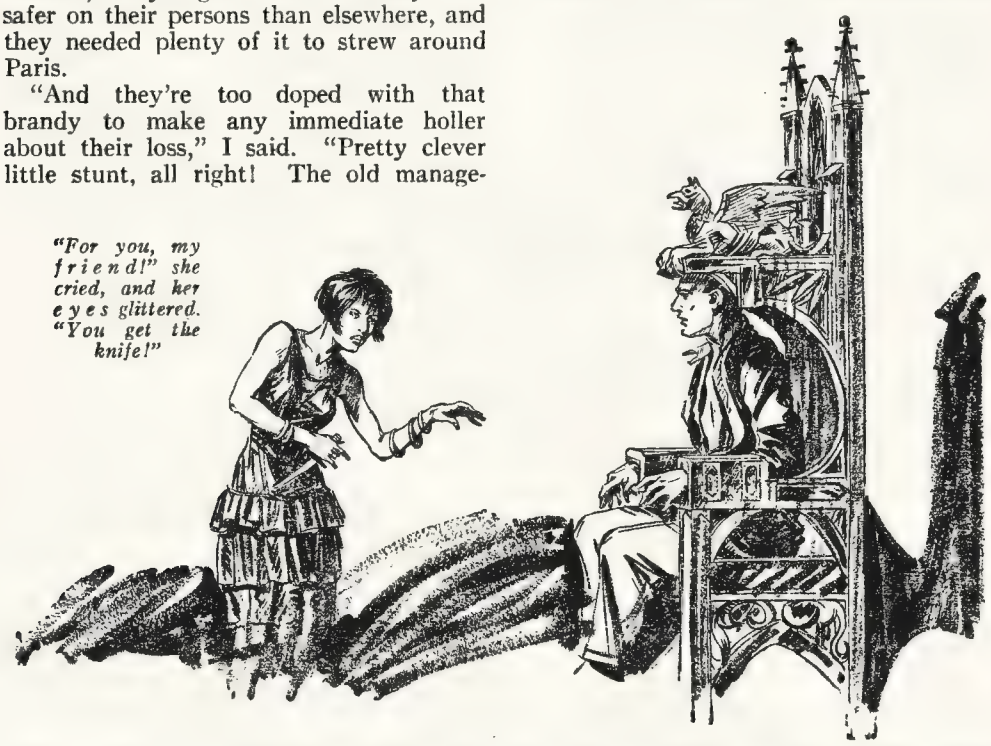
I turned, and just in time. The imp from outside was slipping into the doorway, and I met him with a solid crack on the jaw that jarred my fist and arm and knocked him slap into the wall. He went down in a limp and huddled heap, and a pocketbook fell from his hands, with a large roll of loose hundred-franc notes. It was the loot of the fourth victim.

"SIMPLE enough, Buddy," said Hollock, when I had closed the door. Upon a table was a heap of money, with three fat wallets. "Those two rascals frisked each man as they wrapped him up. The loot was relayed here. It's no trick at all for skillful dips. Pocket it, now, and get out of here! Leave these two as they are—they don't know what hit 'em."

His imp was dead to the world, as was

mine. We scooped up the loot, and I marveled that Wilberforce and his friends would be fools enough to carry so much money around, for each pocketbook was crammed with thousand-franc notes and hundred-dollar bills. It was a rich haul and no mistake. I suppose, like most tourists, they figured their money was safer on their persons than elsewhere, and they needed plenty of it to strew around Paris.

"And they're too doped with that brandy to make any immediate holler about their loss," I said. "Pretty clever little stunt, all right! The old manage-



"For you, my friend!" she cried, and her eyes glittered. "You get the knife!"

ment of the place decamps tonight, and —ready? All right."

We opened the door, slipped out into the passage, and in ten seconds had regained our place at the left of the crowd, without our absence having been observed. The fourth man had been placed in his coffin, and the two imps stood by while the queen went up and kissed each helpless victim, amid yells from the audience.

I did not know what was about to happen, but I wanted badly to get out of here before the storm broke. We could not get out, except by working to the other doorway. This was no simple matter, for the crowd was jammed close, but Hollock took the lead and opened a way. Everyone was so intent on the performance that they made way without much question. We drew toward the door by the stairs; then the lights went out.

"The torment begins!" came the voice of La Reine. "Watch!"

We saw a ghastly and most impressive thing, too. The four coffins became filled with light. A woman screamed. Another cried out and there was a stir as she fainted. For a moment the faces of the four men in the coffins were clearly visible—then they gradually died away. Instead of the living men who stood there, we saw a skeleton in each coffin. Murmurs and cries of horror went up from the crowd, genuinely startled now.

"X-rays, you damned fools!" said the voice of Hollock. "All right, Buddy—quick!"

He had found the door. At the same instant, I heard a sudden yell and a sharp voice crying out in French. Our work had been discovered.

I was through the door after him, and we slammed it shut again, dropping a heavy old bar into place. Then we were leaping up the stone steps, dimly hearing a pandemonium of noise behind us.

"Touch and go now," panted Holly, when we came to the top of the stairs and the corridor beyond. "Damn it—where are my whiskers?"

He put a hand to his face in sudden dismay. His false whiskers were gone; mine also. As we stared at each other, a man stepped into the corridor ahead of

us, gave us one look, then was gone with a yell. He had recognized Hollock's face.

I was after him instantly, Holly at my heels.

We had an excellent chance of getting through the place and out, for the doorkeeper could be depended on to see us away. In this, however, we counted without our hosts. This place had probably witnessed more than one police affair, and was prepared against all emergencies—the old underground rabbit-warren was well suited to its adaptation.

A moment later we were at the doorway of the grotesque dining-room. It was shut and locked—the man ahead of us had acted swiftly. Here, however, we were dealing with a very modern and flimsy door. Side by side, we struck it together, shoulders to the wood, and with a wild crash it gave way.

It not only gave, but it went flat, and we went with it in a headlong tumble that took us sprawling into the room beyond. Some one was shouting, and in the dim light we crashed into a table and brought it down. Next thing I knew, a man was on top of me.

He did not stay there long, however—the fool tried to sit on my neck and hold down my arms. I brought up my knee, caught him squarely at the base of the skull, and he flopped over sideways. I came scrambling up, found a little chap rushing at me with a knife in his hand, and paused not on the order of my doing but gave him the tip of my boot under the chin; he whirled around and went crashing.

Hollock was thrashing around among the overturned tables with two men. I jumped in, knocked one of them off—and then went reeling blindly away with stars before my eyes. Some one had fetched me a very neat crack indeed, and before I was over it, hands gripped me and brought me down with a thud.

MR. BARNES of America and points West did not stay down—he was too scared! I was up, cornered but on my feet, and glimpsed a horde of figures; the guests were crowding out and fighting for egress. With this, somebody threw a bench at the chandelier of skulls and brought it down, and a rope went over my head and jerked me off into the darkness. The fall, the strangling rope, and a kick under the belt all combined to knock the wind and sense out of me for a moment—so far as I was concerned, the fight was over.

WHEN I came to myself, I was sitting in a big armchair in what seemed to be a lady's boudoir.

The transition was astonishing in the extreme. Softly shaded electric lights blazed all around. The walls were covered with rather dirty hangings of brocaded silk; a large dressing-table and a makeup table were at one side, and at the other was a huge mirror in which I gazed at myself. I was alone in the room, sitting in a huge carved oak chair, which went up far above my head.

Two suitcases were on a chaise-longue. They were half packed, and feminine garments lay piled beside them. Coming out of my stupor, realizing that I must be in the quarters of La Reine herself, I started to my feet—and stayed right where I was. That diabolic chair had me gripped tight.

It was true. The massive carved wood encircled my arms below the elbows, and my legs above the knees. The great chair probably weighed more than I did—no effort could budge it. I had read of such things in Italy, but this was my first practical experience of one, and it was not pleasant. I was free, yet absolutely helpless. And where was Hollock?

I was pondering this query when La Reine came into the room, flinging rapid orders at some one outside.

"Have a taxi ready and waiting at the usual place. Clear out, everybody—I'll join you at the taxicab. Leave this *saligaud* to me. No sign of the other?"

"He's got out with the crowd," said a man's voice.

"All right. Everybody clear out at once before he brings the *gendarmes*. I'll pack and come by the secret passage. Have the doors locked."

She swept into the room and halted before me. The Queen of Hell was just as we had seen her on the platform, except that she now lacked the enhancement of that mystic radiance. Probably my stare of stupefaction aroused in her some dormant feeling of shame, because she snatched up a cloak from the pile of garments and donned it; more likely, she was cold. Beautiful she might be, but the venomous hatred in her face stripped it of all beauty so far as I was concerned.

Without a word she dived at me, plunged through my pockets, hauled out the loot and dumped it into one of the open grips. When she had me clean, she looked at the tiny pistols and with a laugh tossed them on the dresser. Then she whirled on me. I scarcely thought of what was sure to happen, in my delight that Holly had got out of the mess.

"Species of cabbage!" she snapped at me, and followed it with a tirade of choice argot that covered my ancestry and probable habits with less nicety than precision. "So you're one of those two swine, eh? And the other got away. Well, he's welcome! Who tipped you off?"

"Nobody needed to tip us off," I said, putting on a bold front. "We know all about you, my dear queen."

"Bah! None of your *blagues*," she spat. "You know nothing."

SHE ripped off her jewels, threw some away, put others into the grips—no doubt separating true from false. Swiftly, she snatched one pile of clothes, took them off into a corner out of my sight, and presently reappeared more decently clad. Then she attacked the two suitcases and in two minutes had them shut and locked.

"Can't I carry them to the taxi for you?" I demanded. She whirled on me and laughed.

"You fool! You'll carry nothing." She swept to the door, slammed it, locked it. For a moment she stood glancing about the room as though making sure she had forgotten nothing. Then she went to the dresser and picked up a knife lying there—an ugly, horn-handled Biscayan knife.

"For you, my friend," she cried, and her eyes glittered at me. "To think that one little shove on the griffin's face above your head would let you free! Wouldn't you like to reach it, eh? Well, you wont. You get the knife, which is better than you deserve."

She went to the big mirror, set in an antique oak frame in the wall, and pressed it at top and bottom. There was a click, as the mechanism worked. The mirror swung out like a door.

And in this doorway stood Hollock, with two *gendarmes* behind him!

"Good evening, my charming queen!" he said. "We were just in time, eh?"

She stood petrified for a moment, and then with a scream of rage hurled herself at him, and the knife flashed.

TWO *gendarmes* and a brigadier—and it took all three of them to quell this female demon. They got her handcuffed at last—a panting, quivering, cursing creature that an hour ago had been a beautiful woman. Holly examined a slit in his coat, grinned at me, and then stood looking at my chair.

"How the devil do we get you out of that?" he demanded. I told him what La Reine had said, and he pressed the griffin above my head. With a click, parts of the carven oak opened, and I was free.

"Interesting," he observed. "I must have this taken to my apartment—it'll come in handy. Hurt? No? That's good."

"What sort of a miracle brought you here?" I asked, rubbing my arms. "Give me a cigarette and explain."

He obeyed, chuckling. "No miracle, Buddy, but a very complete chart of this place made by our friend 'T.' The lady thought nobody knew about her secret passage, and that's where she slipped up. I took a long chance that they'd try to make you talk before knifing you—they wouldn't do it until the last thing anyhow. So all's well. What's this?"

The brigadier had been going through the lady's garments, and now handed Holly a pocketbook. He opened it, and we went through the contents in silence. There was money, an envelope containing tickets to Brussels, identity papers—and nothing else. Holly turned to the woman.

"And the address of M. Tellier in Bruges?"

Her response was worthy of the late General Cambronne, but was unprintable. Holly shrugged and turned to the papers again. Examination showed nothing, and he handed them back to the brigadier, then glanced at me.

"Eleven-fifteen, Buddy—just time to make that train nicely. Ready?"

"Yes," I said. "And we'll not need to call a taxi—the lady has one waiting for us. Good night, my dear queen! I hope you have a pleasant trip to Headquarters."

She writhed up and spat at me like a cat—and I followed Holly along the secret corridor. Ahead lay Belgium, Bruges—and Tellier in his rat-hole!

"The House of Three Cows," another super-exciting story by this favorite Blue Book Magazine writer, will be a feature of our next issue.

The NIGHT HAWK

By BIGELOW NEAL

IT was springtime when Mandan Harry first came among us. I remember the hills lay under a blue and purple carpet of pasque flowers, and faint traces of snow clung like silvery eyebrows above the shaded slopes. Wild ducks, flying steadily toward the North, filled the air with the whistling whir of their wings, and sometimes the honking cries of low-flying geese sounded loud and clear on the evening air.

On the strip of mowed buffalo grass which served as a lawn before our old log house, a group of us had gathered with our rifles, and when the flight of a big flock carried them directly over our heads, we peppered the air about them, usually without results.

My father, who was too old a hand to waste ammunition in a hopeless cause, busied himself farther out in the yard, piling up an armful of petrified wood to make it look as lifelike as possible. Getting some tenderfoot to carry the useless stuff into the kitchen was one of his standard jokes.

Mother was strolling along her flowerbeds, which ran the full length of the eighty-foot house, watching, I suppose, for the first signs of her perennials.

Our ranch buildings lay in the valley of Clear Creek, and the house stood on a slight elevation which sloped down to the shore of the stream. From the front yard we had an unobstructed view for half a mile or more down the valley; and the road, which stretched nearly a hundred miles to the borders of civilization, wound its way beside the creek, until a change of course on the part of the little stream cut off our view.

I remember as though it were but yesterday, the tall man on a buckskin horse who came in sight far down the road; and we ceased our target practice to turn a speculative gaze in his direction. Travelers were few in those days, and a stranger was sure to arouse our interest. Even at that distance we could see that he was an unusual rider, for he seemed to float above his trotting horse without the slightest sign of jar or jolt, and on the turns in the road he leaned slightly in the saddle, just enough to take the strain from his mount.

The horse, too, was truly Western. We noted his long steady stride, and the way he responded to the slightest touch of the rein on his neck. Afterward we learned that his name was Pedro, called so from the five dark spots on his flank.

AT the front gate the stranger dismounted and dropping the buckskin reins to the ground, came into the yard. He approached my father, but seeing Mother, he paused an instant and removed his hat. The finer points of courtesy were not the strong ones in our country, and I was surprised to see another do that which my mother had taught me, in spite of the fact

"An alumnus of the old West" writes vividly of the stirring events of his boyhood—a story memorable for its faithfulness to the facts of the most picturesque phase of American life.

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

that it always had seemed to me a distinct humiliation. He talked with my father for quite a long time, and this gave us a chance to size him up.

His headgear was of gray felt. It was neither a large hat nor a small one. It was so genuinely Western, as indeed was the rest of his make-up, that I am going into detail, so that some of you people who have been fed up by moving-picture heroes trying to imitate something they never saw, will know what the real article looked like. It was not a sombrero; neither was it a great flapping thing of wide brim and high crown as worn today by so many men who are trying to be something they are not and never can be. It was just a good-sized hat, creased through the middle and turned down in front to shade his eyes. Lastly this hat sailed on an even keel, as do all hats unless the wearer is trying to look tough.

He wore the vest from a brown suit, the coat of which was tied over his saddle with his chaps and slicker. The vest was not buttoned but hung back far enough to show the pocket of a blue flannel shirt from which a Durham tag fluttered as he moved. I mention the Durham tag for it was just as much a part of the old West as the Winchester or Colt.

Another item which I nearly forgot was a small white handkerchief around his neck. Question: why does a cowpuncher wear a handkerchief around his neck? In spite of the fact that I wore one for many years, I must answer in the language of my country: "Danged if I know." As for those fellows who decorate themselves with enormous creations of red, blue or white silk, I believe you will find the trouble a little higher up.

A pair of corduroy trousers, tucked into high-heeled boots, gets us down to the ground and to a pair of plain steel spurs the rowels of which were locked, that they might hold to the saddle cinch in an emergency. Needless to say, there were no jingling do-dads to tinkle as he walked, and no half-grown looking-glasses fastened on the spur-straps.

On the way down I passed over one item purposely because it was unusual and has sufficient bearing on this story to merit attention. In front of him, suspended from a three-inch leather belt, were two pearl-handled six-shooters. I speak of them as unusual, because few cowpunchers carried guns, principally for the reason they couldn't hit anything if they had them. Using a six-shooter is an art acquired by but few, and then only after years of practice. As a matter of fact, it has been my experience that the majority of men who wore the six-shooters were closely akin to those who wore the big silk handkerchiefs.

After a while my father brought the stranger across and introduced him to us. I am not going to give his name for reasons you will understand before I have finished. For the purposes of this story we will call him by his nickname—"Mandan Harry."

It was just the season that we were taking on men for the summer's work, and my father had hired him. With that information we all adjourned to the bunk-house for the usual confab, while Mother wrestled the storeroom for fresh bedding.

So far as information was concerned, Mandan Harry was what the well-men call "a dry hole." He talked freely and made friends of us all, in a short time, but afterward, when my mother asked me about him, I was surprised to find that I couldn't answer a single one of her questions. Be-

yond the fact that he was a tall man, about thirty years old, born somewhere in the East and brought up in the West, I was at a total loss. Accepting him as we did, was typical of the country in which we lived. Yesterday was far in the past. Today and tomorrow were all which held interest for us.

During the first summer that Mandan Harry was among us, Father kept him at the home place. I suppose the idea was to keep him under observation until such time as his ability and trustworthiness had been fully tested. At any rate that summer will always remain one of the bright spots in my memory. Being a twelve-year-old boy on a place like ours, more than a hundred miles from town and schools, has certain disadvantages, and not all of them accrue to the boy himself. As a matter of fact I was considered a good deal of a nuisance by the crew in general, and few of them went very far out of their way to show the patience necessary in dealing with one of my kind; but Mandan Harry was the soul of patience. He was one of those rare men who remember the time when they were boys themselves, and in addition he actually took a liking to me, a condition of affairs with which I had had but little experience up to that time. As a result, wherever he went I followed. My estimation of Mandan Harry hardly exceeded the good opinion held by my mother and father; so by the end of the first season, he had taken his place as one of the family.

IT was only a few days after Mandan Harry's arrival that we got down to the spring's work in earnest. The cattle were to be divided into two herds: the breeding stock in one, and the steers to be shipped in the fall and the young stock in another. In addition the calves of the year before were to be branded, dehorned and vaccinated against that bane of all cattlemen —blackleg.

Sometimes a pang of memory stirs within me even yet as I look back at the great corrals with their milling thousands, and I seem to hear again the shrill yell of cowpunchers, dismounted, chapless and spurless, as they worked through a cloud of choking dust, separating one herd from the other; for in spite of all Wild West fiction to the contrary, that work was not done on the open prairie except as a last resort, because it was too hard on horseflesh, cattle and men. Again I see the "round pen," the cattleman's chamber of horrors, although not nearly as bad as one might imagine, because cattle are not so sensitive to pain as human beings, and the branding-iron and dehorners work fast in the hands of experienced men. I can still hear the creaking of straining ropes and the labored breathing of panting cattle. Sometimes, too, I catch the laughter and yells of ridicule from men safe on the fence, as some less fortunate comrade caught his feet in a rope and fell headlong. I can see puffs of blue smoke climbing from the snubbing-post, as a thousand-pound steer struck the end of the rope, which was paid out gradually to save the animal's neck. Some of the memories bring a chuckle, such as the recollection of one man sitting on a brindle steer while his companions scaled the fence to safety and to roll cigarettes while telling the unfortunate one exactly how it should be done. I see him throw off the last rope and strike out for safety with the steer but one lap behind; and then, upon reaching the fence, a marvelous thing happens. He goes up the full ten feet and gains the top without touching a thing. This may seem impossible, but a trial will convince the most skeptical. With a thousand pounds of concentrated fury a few feet behind your rudder, you too would be able to defy the laws of gravity!

One night the work was finished, and with morning came another scene. A corral gate opening, and a long line of bellowing cattle pouring forth and heading into the west, behind them chuck-wagon and cowpunchers. Another gate opened, and another herd moved slowly through the gate, but this one turned toward the north, followed by more men and another wagon. In time they all were swallowed up by a haze of dust which, settling, showed the prairie devoid of life.

There was one other employee on the ranch, besides Mandan Harry, who remained at headquarters during the first part of the summer. Shorty McNider was part Scotch and a little Pennsylvania Dutch. By nature he was a "natural-born" fixer, exercising his talents on everything about the place, from a balky alarm-clock in the bunk-house to any piece of more complicated machinery which needed attention. He spent half of his time getting ready for the Fourth of July—not so much on account of the celebration as because the Fourth came immediately before the fifth,

and always on the morning of the fifth Shorty started his haying crew. From then on until the first frost, he was foreman of that organization, coming home only when, some morning, he found the prairie grass glistening under the first attack of fall.

His next job was fully as important if less romantic. The walls of our buildings were made of logs and of course there were cracks between the members. These were filled, as well as possible, with small pieces of split wood, then plastered with mud, a portion of which fell out each year.

With that part of his crew who, at the first hint of cold, had not remembered important engagements in balmier climes, Shorty mixed mud and plastered the walls of house and barn against the time when a northwest wind would be searching out every weak spot. Next came the annual wrestle with the coal-mine—stripping rubbery blue and yellow clay from the lignite vein and filling the cellar with sixty-odd tons of the finished product.

For a little while then, Shorty took a vacation. He paid off his crew, checked up his accounts with my mother, and sometimes went back East for a visit which lasted until the weather observer at Bismarck wired him the one word: "*Snow.*"

In a few days he would be back on the job, and it was a tough one. From then on it was Shorty who set the alarm-clock, and it was Shorty who transmitted its unwelcome summons to the family and crew. After breakfast it was Shorty who was first at the barn and in the stack-yard. Regardless of weather, on warm days and cold days, in sunshine and blizzard, the cattle had to be fed. When the thermometer hung around thirty below, and a fair breeze fanned the air, it was a hard, grueling job.

It was not all grief, at that. With good luck and fair weather, the feeding and watering were done by noon, and then came hours in the timber along the Missouri, or on the prairie with deer and antelope, and after supper, razzle-dazzle and six-handed euchre, pedro and popcorn. For those of you who are looking for poker and good old rock-and-rye, I have another jolt. On many of the ranches gambling was forbidden and men who drank never got on the pay-roll; but there was one rite we never neglected. After the deck had been shuffled for the last time, it was every man for a slice of venison, a hot stove-lid, salt, pepper and butter and— But these memories grow painful. . . . .

When springtime came again, Shorty went back to his fixing. He fixed mowers and rakes and stackers. He reset wagon-tires and mended harnesses. Lastly but not by any means least, he fixed wild horses so that honest men could associate with them. Meanwhile he waited again for the Fourth of July.

THE bulk of our crew had hardly left on the annual summer pilgrimage when Mandan Harry and I had systematized his work to a point where he was allowed many hours of leisure. In the morning I went for the milch-cows while he carried water and coal and performed such other chores as were necessary around the kitchen. Later, while he was milking, I went after the horses, for we could never tell when my father would want his driving team or Shorty call for a horse to break.

At nine o'clock in the winter, at eight in the seasons of longer days, I had a session where grammar, geography and somebody's elements of arithmetic, and my mother played an important part. By eleven my work was finished, or at least discontinued; and I was at liberty for the day.

For fifteen miles above our place, Clear Creek was little more than a series of ponds strung together wiener-wurst fashion by narrows, over which a thin stream of water flowed during the wet seasons. Beginning a few hundred yards above the place, however, springs line either shore, and sometimes boil along the creek bottom, building cone-shaped formations of white sand and small pieces of lignite coal, which are tossed about on the spouting water until luck or an extra surge throws them beyond the water's reach. The water from these springs is very cold, but still far enough above the freezing point so that the creek does not freeze even in the coldest weather, for some distance below the buildings. It was the springs that caused my father to build where he did, because it was always possible to water any number of cattle without the use either of ax or pump.

Along the creek and among the hills on either side, Mandan Harry and I spent a good part of our leisure time. Black-tailed deer could sometimes be found in the choke-cherry patches, while the bottoms of the deeper ponds were covered with serried ranks of black-backed suckers and chubs. Sometimes we hunted along the Missouri,

although with deer and antelope so plentiful on the prairie it was hardly worth the extra effort required to break through the vines and thorns.

IT was on one of these expeditions that I came to know what our punchers really meant when they spoke of a two-gun man. Whenever Mandan Harry left the home place, he carried the two pearl-handled six-shooters, giving the other men the only chance they ever had to criticize him, for he had never taken any part in the target practice in which the cowpunchers so frequently indulged, and from his apparent indifference had grown the notion that he carried his guns for show and knew little about the use of them.

We had been following the creek trying to hook out some of the suckers, when we came across an old camping ground where some one had left a gallon can which, judging from a half-defaced label, had once contained apples. Boylike, I was always looking for something to shoot at, and the can gave me an idea.

"Let's take a shot at it," I suggested.

"All right," he replied; "throw 'er up!"

Now, I had been figuring on using the can as a target for our rifles, and I was surprised as well as pleased to find he intended to use one of the six-shooters which had for so long been the object of my boyish envy. Stepping forward, I picked up the can and made ready to throw, but seeing out of the corner of my eye that he was merely standing with arms folded, I asked if he was ready.

"Let 'er go!" he said.

I threw the can as high as I could. Motion by motion, it takes a long time to tell what Mandan did in less than five seconds. Until the can was well out of my hand, he stood easily balanced on one foot, his arms still folded and his eyes seemingly fixed on some object far away. Then, like lightning, he went into action. The motions which dropped his hands to the butts and lifted the guns to a position a little in front and a little to one side of his head were almost too quick for the eye. Simultaneously there came a double explosion, followed by the metallic click of lead and steel on tin. I saw the can jump and a piece of paper flutter into the air. I looked back at Mandan, and both guns were revolving around his forefingers, pivoted only on the trigger guards. Each time the barrels came uppermost, there was a double spurt of flame and the can jumped once again. Five times while the can was in the air, the guns spoke; and just as it struck the ground, they roared for the sixth time, sending it spinning across a patch of alkali in a cloud of white dust. When I finally got my eyes and mouth shut to something like their normal condition, I went forward and looked at the can. How many times he hit or missed it, of course, I couldn't tell, but it was no more than a riddled shell, just enough tin left to make rims for the holes and support the few tattered pieces of label remaining.

There have been many men who could execute the double roll; but Mandan Harry was the first in my experience, and from that moment I worshiped the very ground upon which he walked.

It was during the next summer that Harry and I framed up a deal to go to the fair at Mandan. It took a good deal of coaxing on my part to break down the resistance of my mother and father, but in the end they gave in, mostly on account of the confidence they had in Harry's ability to look out for me. A part of my great desire to go was due to a horse my father had given me. He was a strawberry roan, weighing better than eleven hundred, which any cowman will tell you is too much for a saddle-horse. Nature seemed to have compensated him for his extra bulk by equipping him with muscles not only able to cope with his weight, but powerful enough to carry him faster than any other horse we had so far been able to find. On account of this ability to run fast and often, I had named him Bryan. There was a hundred-dollar prize hung up for the fastest cow-horse at the fair, and somehow we had the notion that Bryan and I could just about pull it down.

And so it came about that one morning, Harry on Pedro and I on Bryan, with a pack-horse between us, set out even as the knights of old, to win what honor and glory there might be in store for us.

On the evening of the third day we rode onto the fair-grounds, to find ourselves in a crowd which seemed to be made up largely of Sioux Indians, cowpunchers, professional gamblers and Hereford bulls. We spent the evening taking in the carnival shows. Harry nearly threw his arm out of joint trying to crack open the head of a colored man sticking through a canvas while I picked up a twenty-two in a shooting gallery and won three packages of ex-

Each time the barrels came uppermost, there was a double spurt of flame.

tremely low-grade chewing-gum for the small sum of twenty-five cents.

The fair opened Monday noon and closed Saturday night. On Thursday, I think it was, I broke our routine by crossing the river in the evening and spending a few hours with friends in Bismarck; and when I came back about midnight the town of Mandan was in more or less of an uproar. Some one had held up the cashier and treasurer of the carnival company and relieved that individual of something like two thousand dollars. One-half that sum had been promptly offered by the company for the capture of the guilty party, and as soon as I could get the particulars, I set out to find Harry, for, boylike, I had the instincts of a detective, with no authentic premises upon which to base them. I finally found Harry in a stock pavilion watching the judges as they studied and compared the good and bad points of the animal tenants.

Harry had not heard the news, and we immediately left the pavilion and went over where a crowd had collected around a small building on wheels which was used by the carnival company as an office. The crowd was packed so closely that we were unable to get very near, and so had to be content with such information as filtered back through the crowd. It didn't take long to discover that the management knew very little about the bandit. Beyond the fact that he was tall and wore a gray suit, their description was meager indeed. Of course he had had a handkerchief over his face and carried a bad-looking gun, but the last two items could have been taken for granted. So far as the description was concerned, it might have applied to any number of men present. But the sheriff and officials of the fair, with vivid imagination, at once affixed the title "Night Hawk" to the robber. They were influenced in their choice of names by the fact that a man of similar description had held up a coast train, somewhere in the Bad Lands, early the preceding spring, and afterward returning a ring of little monetary though great sentimental value, to a young lady whose tale of woe had been played up by the newspapers. With it he had inclosed a slip of paper with the words: *"Compliments of the Night Hawk."*

ON the afternoon of the last day the Fair officials had scheduled a horse race and hung up a purse of a hundred dollars for the horse which could get around the half-mile track twice in the least time; and I had entered Bryan as a candidate.

It was midafternoon of as hot a day as one is likely to see when we gathered in front of the grandstand to listen to the rules

we were supposed to follow. Certainly we were a motley and cosmopolitan crowd. The majority were white cowpunchers, though there was a sprinkling of Sioux Indians, and one white man who wore white trousers and a red coat with a cap on the order of a badly discouraged toy balloon. His horse, too, was a little out of the ordinary, being of the long-geared, Kentucky variety, and was equipped with a bob tail and a pancake saddle.

It soon developed that there was not going to be room for all of us in one line across the track, and so we began jockeying for position in the front rank. At that game many of the contestants were old hands, while I was afflicted with altogether too much modesty and not enough experience. As a result, when the pistol-shot came as a signal to start, I was half a length behind the last horse. Bryan was too heavy to make a quick start, and when we finally got under way, there was nothing to see but a blinding, choking cloud of dust.

By the time we reached the first turn we had gotten up speed enough to outrun the dust. Just straightening out on the end of the oval, away ahead, was a slender gray mare and her Indian rider. The nearest competitor, the bobbed-tailed mare from "old Kentuck," and the fellow in red and white, I thought at the time, looked ridiculously like one of those clothespins that depend on a small spring for tenacity of grip.

After we had made the second turn and started up the long stretch across from the grandstand, Bryan began to pick up a little. Until then he had been fighting the bit in an effort to cross to the outside of the track, and I knew he was not doing his best by any means; but as soon as we passed the turn he got down to business. One after another we caught and passed those who had been ahead of us, until at the grandstand we were halfway up the line and running in the middle of a yelling, swearing, sweating bunch of humanity and horseflesh. On the outer lap again, we broke loose from the crowd, forging ahead until there were but four in front of us.

JUST short of the last turn toward the finish line one of the four leaders got tangled up and went down with a crash. That left three ahead and gave us a chance for third place. In my excitement I tore off my hat and hit Bryan across the rump, at the same time dropping flat across his back. Then things began to happen. My first sensation was distinctly one of soaring through space, and I came to the conclusion that Bryan had left the ground, although I could think of no good reason for his doing so. The first impression was confirmed when I saw a whitewashed fence go under me and a man on the ground making frantic motions that seemed to get him nowhere. At such times one thinks quickly and somehow the man reminded me of dreams I used to have as a kid when, chased by an irate setting hen, I tried to crawl out of her way on a pair of legs which absolutely refused to function. Another momentary vision showed me a thickly packed mass of people, splitting apart just in time to let us through, and then we struck the ground. Simultaneously something hit me in the face. Afterward I found I had gathered up a pink and white lace parasol which some young lady had thrown in the air. This effectually blocked my view of the events which followed, but there was a short tug which reduced our speed somewhat, then another onward lurch; and glancing over my shoulder, I saw a miscellaneous collection of wooden nigger babies following us on the end of a rope. A splintering crash—and we ended our career of devastation amid the reel-slats and on the platform of a grain-binder which formed a part of the machinery exhibit.

Evidently my exit had created quite an impression, for I heard a good deal of honest laughter, which was accompanied by howls and shouts of derision. As I led Bryan under the grandstand back to the track again, I was the butt of a good many remarks, and very few could be classed as complimentary. As a matter of fact, the only real damage, aside from a few reel slats and a hole punched in the parasol, was to my pride.

As I came out on to the track, intending to cross to the center of the field where we kept our horses, a loud cheer went up, and I looked around to see what might be the cause; nor did it take me long to decide who was the center of attraction; and realizing that my comedy act still held the crowd, I was hurrying to get out of sight when there came the sharp report of pistol-shots in front of the grandstand. Evidently the latest act was not on the program either, for the band stopped playing, and for a moment, a dead hush fell upon the crowd. In the quiet which followed, I

heard a voice I knew, and looking in that direction, recognized Mandan Harry riding back and forth in front of the grandstand, waving a roll of bills in the air.

"All right, boys, we've heard a lot of this ha-ha noise. We know how nice an' polite an' considerate you can be of a kid's feelings. Now perhaps you'll be good enough to let us talk a little. While some of you wise guys are thinking up some more unpleasant remarks to throw, just listen to me. I've some money here that knows how to talk too, real honest-to-Gawd spondulicks. It not only knows how to talk, but it knows how to talk like a gentleman, and that's more than can be said of some of you. Now, I'm going to make an offer." Mandan stopped long enough to peel off a roll of bills. "I'm going to offer this Indian lad two hundred round simoleons to try another race with the kid. If our red brother wins, he gets the money. If he loses, he will be out nothing but his time. How about it, Red Man, are you game?"

The Indian, who had just tucked a hundred dollars in prize-money into his pocket, appeared nothing loath, and made sundry noises, half Sioux, half English, in the affirmative. Mandan rode over to the judge's stand and handed the two hundred to the official, then turned back to the audience.

"These gents say we can have the track tonight just ahead of the regular program. Now, my noisy friends, let's see if you are as free with your money as you are with your lip. Step right down here, Mr. Would-be-sports. I've got a little money left, and I'm right here to back the roan horse with a thousand dollars. Come on, now, as many as you like but one at a time—just one at a time."

I BELIEVE Mandan would have had no trouble in placing several times the amount he had, for after he was out of money the crowd was still betting among themselves; but before one of them would bet on Bryan, he had to see three or four times as much put up on the Indian mare.

At seven o'clock that evening Mandan Harry and I, Pedro and Bryan, came on the field again. Just ahead of us we heard a roar of applause, as the Indian took his place on the track, but there was nothing for us but a few remarks about the old truck-horse and more to the same effect. Some of the bright sayings were directed at me, and they were not without foundation, either. While the Indian rode bareback, with nothing but a light canvas surcingle, I had a saddle, for in common with most cowpunchers I was utterly at a loss on horseback without one. My saddle weighed something over fifty pounds, which was quite a handicap for Bryan; but in clearing for action we had taken off one cinch and rigged the saddle as a three-quarter. My rope had been taken off, as well as everything else removable. I had shed my boots and spurs and even my underwear and belt, riding with nothing but what seemed indispensable for an appearance in public. The absence of my belt caused one fellow in the crowd to yell:

"Hang on to your trousers, boy, or they wont stay with you at the speed you've got to travel!"

It was a beautiful evening. The sun, just ready to set, had lost some of its fierce heat, and the air had cooled down to a great extent. It looked as though everyone who had been there in the afternoon was back again with the rest of the family. The grandstand was full, and the track was banked all around with spectators. The stirring strains of a march came from the band, and across from the band a long line of performers in vari-colored tights added brilliance to the scene.

When I left, Mandan held my hand for a minute.

"Just take your time, son. Don't hurry, and keep cool. If you lose, there is no great harm done. If you win, it may do a lot of harm—but not to us."

The heat of the afternoon had made Bryan lazy, and when I took my place by the side of the Indian on the starting-line the contrast was really marked, for the gray mare was a nervous animal and seemingly never could stand still. She was trim, smooth and glossy as velvet, while the big roan was covered with bunches of muscles which detracted from his appearance.

THE Indian, being first on the line, had taken the inside position, and would have held it, but Bryan reached over and nipped the gray mare on the flank, which caused her to jump ahead. This gave me a chance, and I was not slow to take the advantage. I had asked for a running start, but the officials wouldn't allow it, so when the pistol-shot finally came, the gray got away and picked up a good lead before I could get Bryan into action. Around the first turn of the track we held our respective positions, except that the Indian moved

over and took the fence again ahead of me. Going down the outer side of the field we gained a little but lost it when we came to the turn, because Bryan was minded to try the fence again. Turning back toward the grandstand, I let the big roan have his head, and on that stretch we closed up again until Bryan's nose was a continuation of the gray mare's tail. Around the other end we held our own, and I felt a wild thrill of confidence surging over me. If I could hold Bryan to the fence on the last turn, there was a chance to close up and pass the gray on the home stretch. When the Indian turned around and saw that he had not shaken me off at the turn, he began to worry, and I saw him lashing his horse, Indian-fashion, with a quirt.

Down the other side of the field we tore, the gray mare skimming the ground like a gliding bird, while the big roan thundered in her wake. The track looked like a broad blue ribbon gliding beneath our feet, and the fence-posts flitted by like cartridges on an endless belt. The last turn was the crucial moment for me, for either we went over the fence or else we didn't. Bryan must have decided in favor of the latter, for he froze to the mare's tail as though it were a halter-rope. Out on the home-stretch we flashed; and there, if ever, we must win. I knew the mare was doing her best from the way the Indian pounded her with his quirt. If Bryan had anything in reserve, we might make it, and in my excitement, I leaned far down over his neck and uttered a series of short, sharp hisses. It was a sound I used to start him with, when working with the cattle. Between the hisses I talked to him; and he understood, for his head went down and his ears lay back until their points were against his neck. Glancing back, I saw his tail riding the wind straight as a ramrod, while under my hand, where it rested on his shoulder, I felt the mighty heave of muscle as he lengthened his stride by inches. With the rhythmic action of a steam piston those mighty muscles drove him forward, and I looked up to see the mare's tail at my side. Inch by inch we crept up, to her rump, to her flank, on to her cinch and then to her shoulder. I knew then that Bryan's head must be in the lead. A murmur rose along the sidelines and in the grandstand that grew and swelled to the volume of a tornado. I caught a fleeting glimpse of hats and parasols high in the air, of people surging on to the track ahead—and then a white streak of lime flashed under me. The old truck-horse had won.

When I pulled Bryan up, Mandan Harry was there to meet me. I dismounted and he took me by the hand.

"Well, son, we did it, didn't we?" was all he said; but as he threw his arm across my shoulder and his face lighted up with the kindly smile he always had for me, the reason for this race he had staged flashed through my mind: to save me, his boy friend, from humiliation. I was only a kid, and I choked so I couldn't speak, but I think he understood.

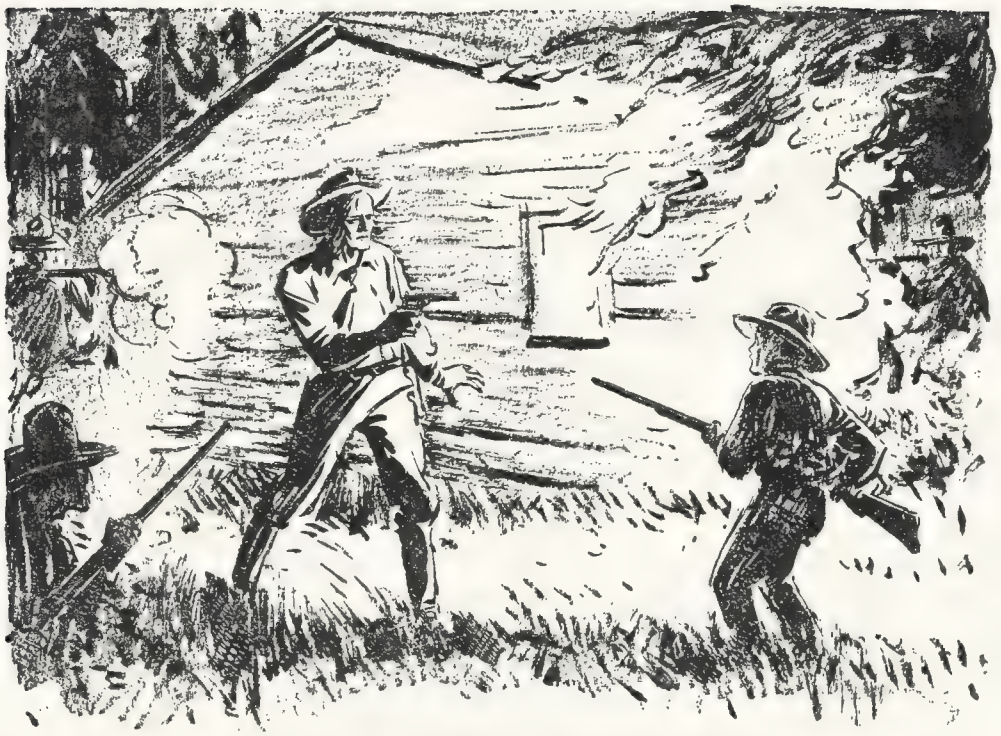
I IMAGINE there comes a time in the life of every normal boy when he dreams of going out into the byways and hedges and tracking down certain desperate characters; now I turned my boyish imagination with enthusiasm to the capture of the Night Hawk.

It is not probable that the hold-up in Mandan would so excite my imagination had it not been for the fact that a long series of similar outrages had preceded it, and as was commonly asserted, had not the perpetrator made his headquarters in the Bad Lands from which hiding-place he issued forth at periodic intervals to hold up train or stage.

Granting that the numerous cases of robbery were staged by the same character, and also granting that the prevailing idea of the base from which he operated was correct, it followed that the Night Hawk must be a neighbor of ours, inasmuch as we lived in the very shadow of the Bad Lands ourselves. Somewhere, then, amid that hell's-brew of alkali, clay and scoria supposedly dominated by the buzzard and coyote, there must be the eyrie of that human bird of prey, the Night Hawk.

On our way home from the fair the subject uppermost in my mind was how to trap the Night Hawk and bring an end to his depredations. At first I failed to fan the enthusiasm of Harry, and I was disappointed, but later when he found that I would be satisfied with nothing less, he consented to help, and so the rest of the way home was devoted to plans and specifications intended to bring the Night Hawk to justice.

ALL during the rest of the summer I waited impatiently for the opportunity to carry our schemes into effect. It seemed that my father never had demanded so much from Mandan as at this time, and



The Night Hawk extended his arm; I was looking into the barrel of a six-shooter. . . . . But nothing happened.

on at least two occasions, when the time seemed auspicious, Mandan Harry was taken with some slight indisposition which prevented our departure. Not the least of the difficulties under which we labored was the necessity of keeping any idea of our plans from my parents.

With the approach of fall came the death of my last hope, for Mandan Harry suddenly announced his intention of riding South for the winter, as some of the other punchers did at times. He tried to ease my disappointment by proposing to come back to us in the spring.

"Don't fret, son," he said. "When the first red-winged blackbird drops into the thornapple patch down there, and long before the suckers begin to run in the creek, I'll be back."

"Is that a promise?" I asked.

"Yes, son," he replied, "yes, that's a promise, if—" He paused there, and I saw his eyes wander away over the prairie; I thought there was a trace of sadness in his eyes and his voice as he finished: "If I am alive."

The meadow larks and the robins had long since left for the South, and the ducks were scudding before the north wind when the time for Mandan's departure came. It seemed to me a sad little party which gathered before the door of our old log house to see him off—my mother and father, Shorty and the cooks and a dozen or more cowpunchers. They were all sorry to see him go, but no one of them felt the real sorrow I felt. Mandan Harry was the only playmate I had ever had in my life.

When he had tightened the last knot which held the lunch Mother had prepared to carry him along his road, there seemed no excuse for further delay. Slowly, one by one, each member of our big family took his hand and said a word of farewell, but when it came my turn, my heart sank, for ignoring me, he climbed to the saddle. With a wave of his hand and a "so-long!" to all, he turned Pedro and started away. I couldn't stand it any longer and started after him, but he had already checked his horse and was beckoning for me to come. I reached his stirrup just as he drew one of the pearl-handled six-shooters from its holster and slipped it beneath his shirt. Then he unbuckled the belt that still carried the other gun, and held it out to me.

"Here, son," he said. "Keep this for me until I come back. If you study hard this winter, I might give it to you in the spring. If I shouldn't come back—well, it's yours to remember me by."

Then I knew that Mandan Harry loved me even as I loved him, for he had given

me one of the two things he cared most for in the world. With the last wave of his gauntleted hand, he turned Pedro and trotted out of the yard. I stood where he had left me, and watched to see if he would look around again, but he did not.

ONE other event transpiring that fall had sufficient bearing on this story to warrant its recital before I pass to the final scenes. Shortly before the Missouri was due to freeze over for the winter, my father sent Shorty down to the city to buy our winter supplies, and to bring them up on the boat. Partly, I suppose, because I was so lonesome since Mandan Harry went away, he gave his consent to my making the trip with Shorty. We intended to return on the boat, but a change in the weather brought a threat of snow and Shorty decided to come back on the stage.

On the last evening of the return trip, while we were passing through a narrow strip of Bad Lands, a menacing shadow loomed ahead in the road, and our driver checked his team and stood up with his hands in the air. Of course it was my first experience in a hold-up, and somehow I forgot to do a lot of things I had always figured on doing in such an emergency. Instead of grabbing the driver's shotgun and boring the robber full of holes, I found myself standing beside the road with a pair of knees which threatened to shorten my stature without warning.

Nor was I alone in my indecision, for neither the driver, Shorty nor either of the other three passengers possessed any more originality than I. We formed a line, back to the stage, and stood or rather wabbled while a tall dark shadow passed behind us, giving each member of the party a thrust in the neck with a six-shooter, as he passed, until he reached Shorty, who stood next to me; then changing his mind for some reason the bandit left the line with the rest of us unsearched, and we heard him fumbling in the stage. The driver told us afterward that he had carried three thousand dollars for the Clear Creek Indian Agency pay-roll, and, needless to say, he carried it no further.

Once more my great ambition to become a detective took fire, and this time with the added impulse of a personal grievance. In the absence of Mandan Harry I naturally turned to my next-best friend, and in the person of Shorty I found an even more sympathetic listener. Shorty's heart was in the right place, and his spirit was strong, but he had certain limitations which operated as a check on his adaptability for the work in hand. In the first place he rode horseback, as he expressed it himself, like a dollar's worth of lettuce. Secondly, while he could shoot almost any type of firearm, he had never been known to hit anything. Considering the foregoing conditions it was obvious that our main dependence must be placed in strategy.

Fall turned to winter and winter softened into spring while we still made plans and accomplished nothing. It was almost time for the return of Mandan Harry, and I was hoping he would come in time for our annual pilgrimage to the Bad Lands in search of stray horses, but when the day came to start, it was Shorty and I who were delegated to make the trip.

It was just breaking day, the first of April, when we climbed from the valley of Clear Creek up to the level of the prairie and thence over its gently rolling surface toward the west. The sky was lined with great Vs, pointed toward the North; some of them, high up and moving swiftly, we knew for teal; others, high too, but not moving so swiftly, we recognized as mallards; much lower and moving with ponderous, squawking dignity came the gray Canadian geese; and once a flock of slender-necked, glistening white swans passed so close above us that we could hear the fanning of their great wings.

A little before noon we were climbing toward one of the ten thousand horizons which greet the traveler on the prairie. We had climbed a dozen before, none of which had led to anything but another just like it. This one, however, was to be the last of its kind, for as we reached the top, we were standing on the crest of a bluff which fell away in sudden steps of limestone and clay down into the wild, chaotic jumble of clay, rock and scoria we call the Bad Lands. Spread out below and before us, as far as the eye could reach, were the peaks, buttes and ridges of that wild land.

NEAR where we stood, a cañonlike valley led sharply downward, and following it, we came to the floor of the valley, which was here white, hard-packed clay or alkali. Sometimes we moved through grass halfway to the horses' knees, only to come to areas of blue-white alkali again, the sulphurous salts of which clung to the branches of scattered gumbo weeds, caus-

ing them to glisten in the sunlight like frosted lace. These alkali beds were littered with bones of buffalo, deer and elk, relics of a bygone day.

At noon we stopped where a tiny stream of clear water trickled from under a lignite vein. We dug a hole in the mud with our hands, so that the water might collect in sufficient quantities for the horses, and afterward we climbed the tortuous sides of a ravine, to a point where the buffalo grass would furnish feed for the horses. We ate our own lunch and lay down for a nap.

Shorty slept, but my eyes would not close. In spite of all efforts, they kept wandering off among the peaks, not so much on the lookout for stray horses as because I knew that somewhere in these halls of antiquity, there dwelt the Night Hawk, and now that I was in the Bad Lands, I meant to find his hiding-place if such a thing were possible.

There were two ways of getting stray horses out of the section of the Bad Lands where we lived. One was the obvious way of driving them out, which was hard on both man and beast and none too sure, at that. The other way was to build a fence around the half-dozen water-holes which would remain after the pools made by the melting snow were dry. The horses would be compelled to go to the prairie country to drink. We had chosen the latter system, and for that reason carried an ax on our pack-horse, as well as staples and a wire-stretcher. The wire itself lasted over from year to year, and an occasional clump of cottonwood and ash furnished the extra posts needed.

By dark we had repaired two fences and reached the third, and so we went into camp in a narrow ravine where the grass was good and a thicket of buffalo berries furnished firewood. After supper we hunted around for a dry spot to spread our blankets, but the level ground was still boggy from the recently melted snow, and so we finally carried the bedding down to the point where the ravine we were in joined the valley we had been following. Here on a little ridge covered with creeping cedar we prepared to spend the night.

SHORTY was one of those fortunate ones who can yawn once, blink twice and be in dreamland; years on the trail and in camp had taught him the trick of going to sleep whatever the conditions and wherever he might be, but I was too much of a boy to accomplish the feat, and lay awake, listening to the thousand and one strange noises which came out of the night. Once I was almost asleep when a mass of scoria broke from its moorings and slid down a nearby butte with the hissing clatter of slate. Again my eyes were closing when the triple yelp of a coyote, less than a hundred yards away, brought me to a sitting posture. Hearing the click of the breech-block as I slipped a cartridge into my rifle, he ceased his serenade and moved on. Once again I was drifting off, when a sound like the rattle of a snare drum brought me up with a jerk and a prickly sensation running up and down my scalp. Shorty came up too this time, and I saw him reach under his blanket and bring out his forty-five-seventy. Whatever the noise was, it came from down the valley and was growing louder every instant. Suddenly it dawned upon us that we were listening to the hoof-beats of a running horse, magnified and echoed back by the clay hills on either side. Louder and louder it grew until it seemed as though we would be ridden down, and then we caught a fleeting vision of a rapidly moving shadow. The shadow and the noise died away in the distance.

"That's him," gasped Shorty.

"That's who?" I queried.

"That's him," he repeated, "as sure as God made little apples."

"Who in the dickens is him?" I echoed, exasperated by his meaningless repetition.

"That's the Night Hawk, or my name's mud. Who in hell else would be gallivanting this graveyard this time o' night? Who's got any business here besides us? Who's goin' to run any single-action horse-race up and down this boulevard o' pot-holes when an honest man can travel in the daylight? Who else but the Night Hawk? It's him; that's all there is to it."

"If it's the Night Hawk, let's find out where he's going. Come on, or we'll be too late!" I exclaimed.

"Now, keep your shirt on, kid. You'd raise hell and put a prop under it, tryin' to find that feller in the dark! We don't give a royal damn where he's goin'; it's where he come from that we want to find out. Now you just listen to me. He's goin' somewhere, ain't he?"

"Sounded like it," I admitted.

"All right, he's goin' somewhere. Now, how long do you expect it'll take him to get back?"

"At the rate he was going at the time he passed here, he ought to have been back before he got started," I replied.

"Don't try to be smart; you lack the foundation," Shorty came back. "Just drink in what I say and you'll know somethin' besides these Bad Lands. That feller can't get no place much and back before daylight, now, can he?"

"Not where anyone lives," I conceded.

"That's just it; and what's more, he don't dare travel in daylight, so the best he can do is to get back here sometime tomorrow night. Now, tomorrow we'll find out where he come from; and when he gets back we'll be gone ourselves."

"But unless we can back-track him, we can hunt for a lifetime and be no wiser than we are now," I argued.

"You may grow up some day," countered Shorty, "but you've got a good long ways to go yet. Listen some more! That feller left wherever he come from after dark—now, didn't he? Part of the way he had to go danged slow, no matter how well he knows the lay of the land. Now I'm just betting you four dollars against that hole the colt bit in the seat o' your britches the other day, that guy holes up less 'en five miles from here and we know the direction!"

Shorty's brand of logic seemed unanswerable, no matter what it was built on. At any rate there was nothing to be done until morning, and so we turned in and finally got to sleep.

WITH the first peep of daylight Shorty turned out and started the fire. Hurrying through breakfast, we fixed the fence around the spring and took up the trail of our friend of the night before. For two or three miles we were able to track him with comparative ease, where later in the season it would be hardly possible to find an imprint in the valley floor.

Eventually we came to a place where the valley split into three divisions, one to the right, one to the left and the third continuing as before. The one to our right had a floor of gumbo which was still soft enough to have shown the print of a horse's hoofs, had there been any. This left the choice equally divided between the other two, though we could find no tracks in either. Finally we decided to follow the one to the left for a mile or two, and finding nothing, cross over the divide between that and the one ahead of us.

According to Shorty's calculations the Night Hawk could not have come more than two miles in addition to the distance we had already traveled on his trail, and so when we had followed the tortuous course of the valley we had chosen for about that distance, we left it and scaled the bluff on its right hand side, intending to cross over as we had planned.

Much to our surprise, upon reaching the top, we found that the bluff, instead of being level as buttes are supposed to be, was actually concave, like the crater of a volcano. Sometime in the bygone centuries a vast bed of lignite had burned out in the heart of the butte, allowing its surface to settle some thirty or forty feet and forming a pocket, surrounded on all sides by a nearly perpendicular wall.

Looking down over the edge, we saw the floor was dotted with clumps of poplar and cottonwood, and nearly at our feet the sunlight was reflected on a thin stream of water which wandered out from under the wall, to lose itself in a sink-hole further on. Halfway across the depression we saw that which set our hearts to beating high with excitement; for there, on a cottonwood-covered knoll, stood a small log house, undoubtedly the home of the Night Hawk. Two weeks later, with the trees in full leaf, we might have looked in vain, for the house would have been hidden.

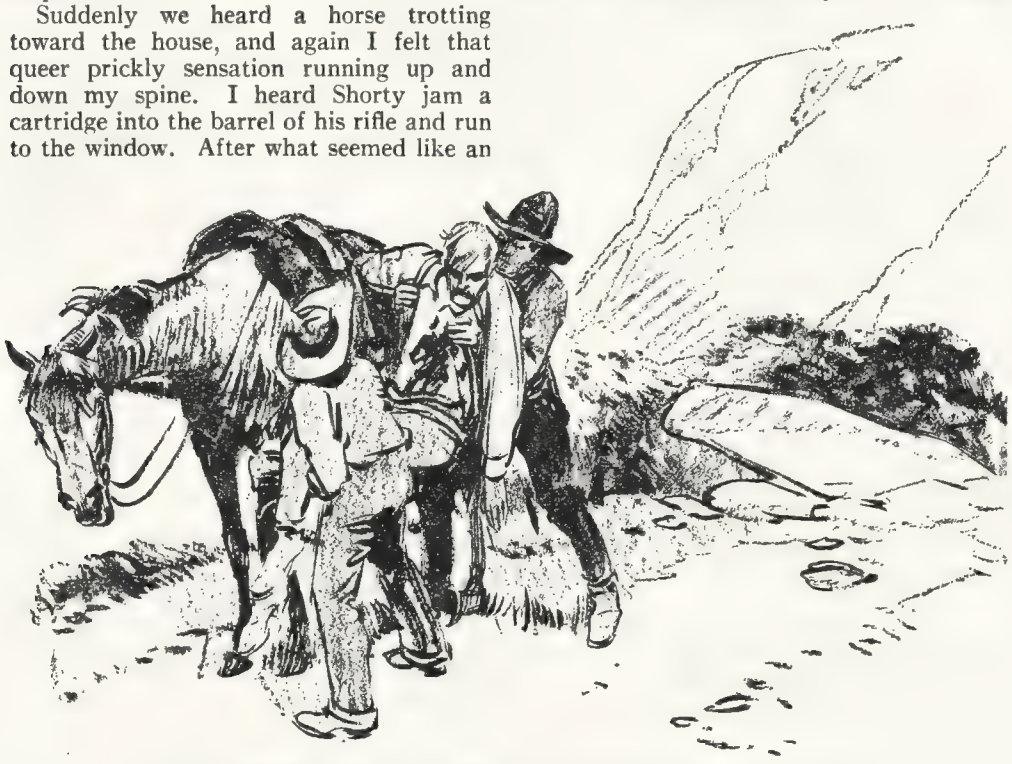
FOR a time Shorty and I alternated between looking at the house and at each other. We never doubted for an instant but what we had found that for which we were looking. A place so securely hidden could never be the home of a small rancher, or we should have heard of him.

Leading our horses down far enough to be out of sight from behind, we slipped our rifles from the saddles and began a cautious descent into the pit. Fortunately nothing happened, and we reached the bottom without mishap, by clinging with our hands and feet to the veining in the clay.

We found the latch-string out, and Shorty gave it a jerk, at the same time pushing on the door with his foot and thrusting the muzzle of his rifle in ahead. Nothing happened, and we entered. We found exactly what one would expect to find in a log shack in our country: A small laundry stove, a bunk and a rudely constructed table built against the wall. A shelf holding a few books and several boxes of ammunition vied with several pieces of

clothing in trying to cover the otherwise bare walls. On the window-sill, an alarm clock still ticked, though its pulse was feeble. There was absolutely nothing by which we could gather an idea of whom we were visiting, though we searched as closely as possible without disturbing things to an extent that would excite suspicion.

Suddenly we heard a horse trotting toward the house, and again I felt that queer prickly sensation running up and down my spine. I heard Shorty jam a cartridge into the barrel of his rifle and run to the window. After what seemed like an eternity of waiting, he began to laugh; and although the laugh was a bit shaky, I detected something of the relief I felt when I opened the door and saw a gray mare without saddle, bridle or halter, standing almost on the threshold. The feeling of fear had hardly passed, however, before another emotion took its place; for the little mare was none other than the one Bryan and I had beaten on the track at Mandan the summer before!



With trembling fingers we lowered our burden as gently as we could.

SPECULATION got us nowhere. The mare was there, but how or why we could not explain.

In the end we came to the conclusion that our best course was to return home at once. Indeed, it was the only course, since we were evidently not the type of heroes who capture bandits, anyway. Somehow the things we discussed doing if we ever found ourselves in this position got lost in the shuffle, and we decided that help would be highly appropriate.

It was very nearly midnight when after a decidedly forced march we rode down into the valley of Clear Creek, and here we ran into still another surprise: the stalls where we ordinarily tied our horses were already occupied, and in addition the alleyways were littered with saddles and riding equipment in general. From my mother I learned that the party consisted of the United States marshal and our local sheriff accompanied by several deputies. Evidently our reinforcements had met us halfway.

I learned then that on the night we had seen the lone rider leaving the Bad Lands, there had been another hold-up, something like forty miles to the south of us, and these men had ridden all day and a part of the night in an effort to get within striking distance of the Bad Lands before the bandit would be likely to leave again. It seemed that Shorty's calculations had not been so far wrong, after all.

That which was particularly pleasing to

me was the fact that these men wanted me to guide them through the Bad Lands. My father was away at the time, and Mother consented with the understanding that Shorty should go too.

Last-minute preparations delayed our start until very late the following night, so that when we rode down the steep hill into the Bad Lands, faint streaks of light were already breaking in the east. A mile farther, and we stopped in a poplar thicket and went into camp for the day. I think that was the longest day I ever spent. Some of the men slept, but the most of them, when they learned that Shorty and I were leading them directly to the den of the Night Hawk, evidenced signs of nervousness which precluded the possibility of sleep. During the day Shorty and I drew a rough sketch of the crater and the position of the cabin, which the marshal and the sheriff studied thoroughly so that they might operate with the least danger of confusion, in the dark.

AT last the sun dropped below the horizon, and with the coming of dusk we moved out in single file, Shorty and I in the lead. Arriving at the foot of the big butte, we halted and left our horses. It was here that the party divided, Shorty taking the sheriff and half the men up by the route he and I had followed two days before, while I led the marshal and the rest of the men around the butte so as to attack from the other side. The two leaders had set their watches together, and it was agreed that each party was to begin the descent at ten o'clock.

In getting my party into position, we had a bit of unlooked-for good fortune. A short distance back from the rim we stumbled onto a well-worn trail which led down over the crest and furnished probably the only outlet from the crater practicable for man and horse. We had figured on using two or three lariats tied together to aid in the descent, but discovering the trail made it unnecessary for our party to resort to them.

Nine o'clock came; the marshal whispered his final instructions, and we started down the path carrying our boots and picking our way with great care. From our position we could not see the front of the cabin, but a faint glow reflected on the branches of a tree told us that the cabin was occupied. Spreading out in the form of a crescent, we moved slowly forward until a whisper coming down the line told us that our right and left were in contact with the other party, completely encircling the cabin, with our men somewhere about twenty yards apart.

The silence of death had settled over the little hollow. Protected on all sides from the breeze as it was, not a twig stirred. Too early in the season for frogs and crickets, the usual noises of the night were almost wholly absent. Once we heard the stamping of a horse, and once the faint moan of a turtledove from the branches of a tall cottonwood, then the silence closed in again, heavy and oppressive as the darkness itself.

Suddenly a vivid flash of red flame stabbed the night as a nervous deputy saw something move within the cabin and fired ahead of time. I heard the marshal swear, but it was too late; the damage was done. With the report of the rifle the light in the cabin went out, flickering once or twice as though some one had not used breath enough in the first effort.

Again silence; but now the tension was greater, for we realized that sharp eyes were watching for the first movement in the darkness, but soon I saw a shadow move forward from our line behind the house, a flicker of a match held high under the low eaves, and a burst of flame as the dry grass and buckbrush between the shakes caught fire. Just as the retreating shadow reached our line again, there came an angry spurt of flame from between the logs where the chinking had fallen out.

The Night Hawk had no intention of waiting to be smoked out, for the boarding on a sashless window in the rear wall was ripped out, and a man sprang through the opening. He paused a moment in the full glare of the fire overhead, evidently undecided which way to run; then gathering himself together, he darted straight toward us—toward me, as it happened. There was a heavy crash of rifles, and I saw splinters fly from the walls and heard the whining moan of ricocheting bullets high overhead.

At the first discharge the Night Hawk stopped and looked about in a puzzled way, then extended his arm, and I was looking down the barrel of a six-shooter. Burying my face in the dirt, I waited for what seemed to me to be the inevitable. But nothing happened, and gathering courage at last, I looked up to see the dreaded bandit lying at full length and face downward on the ground. A wild yell of exul-

tation ran around the line, and the men came running from all directions. Some one turned the robber over on his back, and I heard Shorty, who was just ahead of me, exclaim in a tense whisper:

"God a' mighty!" and turning he grasped my arm with a warning "Sh!"

As I joined the circle and looked down, I understood, for there, on the ground at our feet, brightly illuminated by the light from the burning building, lay all that was left of my playmate, my companion, my friend, Mandan Harry.

IT was a sad little procession that wound its way through the age-old cañons and past the barren peaks during the late hours of the night, Bryan and I in the lead, Pedro following under the burden he had carried so many times in happier days, and lastly Shorty, leading the little gray mare. She too seemed to realize that she had lost a friend, for instead of the high-spirited dancing tread of old, she walked steadily with lowered head. Sometimes, where the going was rough, the empty steel stirrups of Mandan's saddle struck against the cinch buckle, giving forth a sound like the silvery tinkle of a little bell. Beyond that and the occasional ring of Bryan's iron-shod hoofs on rock or bone, we moved with the solemn silence of the hills about us.

Two hours before, the marshal and sheriff had left us at the burning cabin. Their work was done. The Night Hawk, so long a terror to the mail-clerks and to the stage-drivers along the Missouri, lay dead at last. The long arm of the law had found and crushed the last of our outlaws, and then the officers of justice had left Shorty and me to dispose of their victim as we saw fit. No one knew his name or where he came from; nor would they ever know now. By neither deed nor word had Shorty or I intimated the slightest knowledge of the bandit—I don't know why, unless it was that we instinctively wished to keep alive the memory of our friend Mandan Harry and to allow no little hint to go abroad that the personality of our comrade had merged into that of the Night Hawk.

With the rear cinches of our saddles, our lariats and the bedding some of the boys had dragged from the burning cabin, Shorty had built a great pack on Pedro. At first the faithful animal was afraid of the limp and dangling form of his master, but after we led him close and he had caught the scent of the man who had been his friend as well, he became quiet, and watched us lift the lifeless form across his back.

As we rode through those halls of antiquity, wrapped in the majesty of the night and under the twinkling dome of the sky, my mind went back over the events of the last year, and all became as clear as the crystal waters of our springs at home. The money which Mandan had bet on Bryan must have been the same money he had taken from the carnival company the night before. Surely he must have known that he was running a great risk, but he had taken that risk, and for what? Obviously to save the pride of his boy friend from humiliation. There could be no other reason, for the money he might hope to win was as nothing compared with the gold and silver he had hidden in the Bad Lands.

I remembered the night of the hold-up; he had turned away from Shorty and me, leaving the rest of the line untouched; then another thought came: the memory of the day when I had first taken the big six-shooter out for target practice. I had fired five shots without raising dust on the prairie beyond, and an examination revealed the fact that the sixth cartridge was a blank.

I ran my hand into the breast of my shirt and drew out the revolver he had used a few hours before, as he burst from the little cabin. I dropped the cartridges into the palm of my hand, one by one. Three of them had been discharged; the other three were blanks: even in the hour of peril, Mandan Harry had not intended murder. . . . .

I supposed at first that he had stolen the little gray mare, but I found out afterward that he had paid the Indian owner all that he had asked. He had wanted the fastest horses in the country, of course, but he was not a horse-thief. And so he had been true to a certain code after all. A bandit, yes; but a murderer or horse-thief, never.

At last we came to the edge of the Bad Lands and began to climb the long slope toward the open country. It was a hard climb for Pedro, but he made it steadily, without a lunge, and when we had emerged on to the level prairie once more, we stopped to give the great buckskin a chance to rest.

WHILE waiting there still wrapped in the mantle of night, a strange thing happened. From somewhere, seemingly beneath our feet, there came a weird sound

like a soul in anguish. With a great effort I suppressed a cry of fear. Never in my life had I heard anything like it. I opened my mouth, and my teeth chattered so that I could not speak. Then it came again, longer and if possible more agonizing than before, and ending in a sound like a smothered cough. Left to myself, I believe I would have run, for my nerves were not very steady in the presence of darkness and death; but as I turned, I saw that Shorty was already off his horse, tearing at the ropes that bound the body of Mandan Harry to the saddle. With trembling fingers we untied the last knot and lowered our burden as gently as we could, until it rested on the ground.

A few hours before, the marshal and sheriff had looked at the great hole low in the breast, and their decision had been instantaneous and unanimous. The Night Hawk was dead for the simple reason that no man could live for a moment with a heart torn to shreds by a heavy bullet; but now something had gone askew. By the light of matches held above his face, we saw that the spidery webs of crimson froth on the lips of Mandan Harry moved in and out, very slowly, it was true, but still enough to show that the lungs were making a feeble effort to function.

Shorty was the first to regain his presence of mind and reach a decision.

"There's only one thing to do, kid; you stay here, and I'll take the little gray and make a dive for the home place. I can hitch a team on to the spring wagon and get your mother back here sometime before noon. Probably it will be too late by that time, but we can try anyway."

As I knelt by the side of Mandan Harry and listened to the dying hoof-beats of the little gray mare, I was thankful for that faint glow that was beginning to form above the eastern horizon. I think, if the truth be told, I was more awed by this mysterious something, halfway between life and death, than of the latter as a known quantity. From somewhere back on our trail a coyote had caught the scent of blood, and I heard his shrill yelp and mournful howl reverberating in the Bad Lands. Nor was he alone, for soon there came answers from every direction, others of his kind trailing their weird notes on the night air. I went to Bryan and returned with my rifle, although I knew the prairie wolves would not venture an attack.

The first faint color in the east spread, gradually turned to pale gold and then to crimson. By the increasing light I looked down into the Bad Lands, and saw a gray timber wolf trotting along our trail and sniffing the ground. Raising my rifle and taking careful aim I pulled the trigger. It was a long shot, down-hill, and I was probably nervous; but anyway, I saw the alkali dust rise in an angry spurt, and beyond, a gray form streaking it for safety.

THROUGHOUT the long hot hours of the forenoon, I sat beside the unconscious form of my friend, leaving him only once or twice, when I went down into the Bad Lands and returned with my hat full of the coffee-colored seepage, which had gathered in the footprints of horses and cattle, that I might have something with which to moisten his face and lips. As the sun swung higher and the heat increased, I led Pedro around so that his shadow might protect his wounded master from the blinding rays; then with the hat which we had hung on the saddle-horn, I fanned his face.

Toward noon Mandan Harry opened his eyes, but the bright light forced them shut again almost instantly. Stooping over, I placed the hat so as to increase the shadow above his face and waited. In time the eyelids flickered again.

"Harry," I said, "can you hear me?" I saw a puzzled frown gather on his brow, and after a time he spoke although his voice was very weak.

"That you, son?"

"Sure," I replied, tickled to death that he was able to speak. "Whom did you think it was?"

Instead of replying, he closed his eyes again and seemed to wander off somewhere, coming back suddenly with another question: "Seen any robins yet?"

"Yes," I answered, "a few."

"Guess I'm a little late; guess I must have strayed along the road somewhere," he commented.

There came another long pause, during which I continued my fanning and waited for his strength to return; but after a while he stirred and made a feeble effort to raise his head.

"Where's the rest of the gang?"

"Gone," I replied. "They pulled out and left Shorty and me to bury you. We decided to take you home, got this far and found you were alive, and now Shorty has gone after Mother and the spring wagon."

"A fine mess," he said bitterly. "A fine mess, indeed."

After that he was quiet for a long time, and I did not disturb him further but turned my attention to fighting away a migrating colony of ants that had appeared on the scene. . . . .

Living as far as we did from the borders of civilization, our medical and surgical aid was mostly of the home-made variety, but Mandan Harry might have fallen into far less capable hands.

It was after noon when Shorty finally stopped his foaming team beside us and Mother climbed down with her big grip full of bandages and drugs. While Shorty and I stood by, she went to work; and it was not long before she was able to relieve at least a part of our anxiety. The bullet, evidently coming from an angle and striking a glancing blow, had plowed through a section of one rib and then out again, causing a wound that was not necessarily fatal, barring infection.

It was in my mother's room in the southwest corner of the long log house that Mandan Harry fought his way back to health and strength. Almost under the West window was the path that led from the barns to the spring, and many a cowpuncher passed within a few feet of the man they knew and feared as the Night Hawk; and yet the log walls held their secret well, for we had brought the wounded man in after dark, and no one but my father and mother, Shorty and I, had been allowed in the room.

DURING the weeks Mandan Harry lay on my mother's bed, with nothing to do but think, or maybe listen to the bees and hummingbirds droning in the woodbine against the screens, a great change took place within his wounded breast—within the man who had once been the terror of the night. During that time the Night Hawk died and passed from the arena of life forever. Truly I believe he was buried in the grave Shorty and I afterward dug by the charred walls of the burned cabin in the Bad Lands; for though the grave contains nothing but the soil we had taken from it and then replaced, one thing is certain; the dreaded Night Hawk never appeared again, but in his place we had a sincerely repentant Mandan Harry who had made all restitution within his power. Indeed, on the last trip Shorty and I made to the Bad Lands, we followed Mandan's directions and dug from under a vein of slack lignite, a box which contained the loot of every robbery the Night Hawk had staged. Never drinking or gambling, he had saved whatever he took, because his was one of those natures that seemingly must have, or think they must have, excitement, though the proceeds turn stale after the first thrill of possession.

The United States Attorney was a friend of my father's, and when Father returned the stolen money and other articles, he was closeted for a long time with that official. In the end it was agreed that Mandan Harry might leave the country quietly, and after a period of years, provided he could show a clean record, he might return and no further action would be taken.

AND so it came about that one evening in the early summer Mandan Harry and I rode together once again—this time under the boughs of elm and cottonwood and along the trail through the timber and so out to the Missouri. On the sandbar we halted, for here we were to part. The many things I had intended to say became a hopeless jumble and merged with the tears in my eyes. I think Harry was troubled the same way, for he turned Pedro so that their backs were toward me and I could not see his face. At last he spoke, but the words came slowly:

"Well, son, here again the trail divides!"

Though I tried to answer, something in my throat lumped so large as to forbid speech. After a time he went on:

"But some day I'm coming back, and—" Again his voice trailed off, and I took to gazing out across the great river, toward the gold and green and blue-streaked bluffs beyond.

Those were the last words I heard him speak, for he urged Pedro down the bank, and they took the water with a splash and a surge of foam. Standing where he had left me, I watched his long fight with the river until he finally emerged on the other shore. For an instant he stood on the bar, illumined by the last rays of the setting sun. I caught a tiny flash of light from the silver star on his gauntlet; then the willows parted and he was gone. . . . .

Years have passed. The love of a boy has ripened into the affections of a man, but always I have held fast to the faith that some day he will come again.

THE END.

REAL EXPERIENCES

By
Floyd C. Manson

The tremendous real adventure of a submarine crew trapped under-water—and who lived to tell of it.

One Chance in a Thousand

ON December 7th, 1921, at eight-thirty A. M., *S 48*, sister ship of the ill-fated submarine *S 51* (which was rammed and sunk off New London, Connecticut, with the loss of all but two of her crew) cast her lines and sailed from the submarine base at Bridgeport, for an intended trip to New London, with a crew of forty-odd aboard, including Government men, company representatives and trial crew, I myself being one of the crew.

A few minutes before nine o'clock orders were passed along to rig ship for crash dive. That meant every man at his station.

All the hatches were dogged except the conning tower, which cannot be closed while boat is under engine power, because of the enormous suction from the two nine-hundred-and-fifty horsepower Diesel engines.

Then came the shriek of the siren for diving. The engines were shut down, the clutches spun out, the remaining hatch dogged down, the battery current thrown into the main motors, while the bow rudders were being rigged out. Two enginemen were working for dear life closing exhaust valves leading to the top side. Then came the hum of the air machines that operate the flood valves leading to the main ballast tanks, and we were headed down. All this happened in the space of two minutes' time, as every man not busy stood tense at his station.

Something went wrong in the engine-room; water was coming over the top of the port engine and running over the deck plating. The engine crew jumped to the exhaust valves, thinking one had stuck, but the water was still pouring in. Then the big sub lurched and settled aft.

THE Captain frantically gave orders to close the after main tank valve. "My God, it's stuck!"

The inrush of the water had jerked it open.

Seeing the water building up in the engine-room, the aft tank-crew made a run to get to the center control before it was too late; the last man through was waist-deep in water and then, as they pulled him through, the center control water-tight door was slammed shut and dogged down. One second lost and he would have been left to perish, as that bulkhead was our only salvation.

Then down, down, down, ten, twenty, thirty, and very soon depth-gauges registered one hundred feet below the surface, and we were resting on the bottom of Long Island Sound with over a hundred tons of water in the aft end of the sub and only a water-tight bulkhead holding back that enormous pressure.

And then the quick-witted electricians pulled the main switches, which saved the batteries from being shorted. Now we were in total darkness; the air-pressure was frightful.

"My God, my eardrums are bursting!" I tried to say to my buddy, who was standing beside me, but I couldn't even hear myself talking, as the pressure was getting maddening. Then came relief as the Captain "vented" the boat and relieved the pressure. Some one cried out for a flash-light so the electricians could see to cut the cables leading to the flooded compartments.

"Strike a match," suggested a green man.

"If you do, I'll break your damn' head!" cried a Navy officer. Then silence, as one of the crew searched his locker for a flash-light, which he found. It was nearly worn out, but it furnished enough light to enable the men to see to cut the cables, before it dimmed out; however, its purpose was served.

The lights came on; what a relief to be able to see around us down in that steel tomb, even if our chances were very slim!

A CRY from one of the electricians that water was coming through the battery vents into the batteries. That meant chlorine gas. Men were put to work tearing down vent lines, others at shoring up the valve that had sprung a leak. The Captain was very coolly giving orders; torpedoes with help signs wired on them were being fired, the oscillators being useless to signal with, their motor control being under water.

Every man was put to work. I found myself down in the main pump-room trying to get a suction to the only pump we had left, but cork from the bilges had filled the suction line and I had to saw off a three-inch pipe with a hack-saw, in water to my waist. At last it was done and the pump took its suction. All around me men were bailing water from the bilge into the regular tank to be blown overboard. To keep the water back from shorting the motor to our remaining pump was our only hope, and very soon our men showed a marked gain on the bulkhead leak. Our only chance to get out lay in lightening the forward end of the boat so that our torpedo tubes would come out of water. This seemed an almost impossible task, with so much water in the aft end of the boat. The whole deck was charged with electricity and sparks flew when the men hit against the switchboard rail with their buckets, causing them to dump the contents on the deck.

After two hours in the pump-room, I was relieved and made my way forward for a spell; my head was spinning and I felt mighty groggy.

IN the battery compartment I saw a Company draftsman trying to figure out our predicament on paper; he was so nervous that the paper looked like a sieve from the pencil point. At last he threw the paper from him and said: "Like rats in a trap!"

Everywhere men were at work getting rid of all the ballast possible; the pig-lead ballast was being dropped through the sounding device, which carried it into the water under the boat, and more of it had to be carried aft as far as possible in order to lighten the bow. The forward tanks were being pumped of their oil and water. All of our torpedoes had been shot and the deck showed a number of degrees pitch, which was all to our advantage. And our grand old Captain was passing among his men with words of encouragement.

Then came a terrible lurch as the boat settled aft and for a moment it looked bad for us. Then we realized that one chance in a thousand had come to us. We had been resting on the edge of a well in the sound and as we settled back, our bow came to the surface, which we discovered by taking a look at our forward pressure gauges.

But what was that funny smell? Our eyes were smarting and our lips burning. Then it came to us: "Chlorine gas!" The water in our battery compartment had run back with the pitch of the boat and was covering our end batteries. Of course we couldn't bail sulphuric acid with buckets, and how were we going to get the water below the tops of those batteries? At last a rubber air hose was found, which one of the men had thrown in the boat before leaving deck, and this did the trick, as we cut it in sections, putting one end in the battery bilge and with our mouths getting a suction, then syphoning it into the regular tank, from which it was blown overboard.

A volunteer was called for. He was to crawl through a torpedo-tube, after we closed him in, to find if it was clear of the water. We would crack the outer muzzle door a little and if there was water, he would rap with a hammer. At the first opening, there came a *rat-a-tat-tat,* but at the next try he found that the water had only collected around the muzzle of tube, and he made his way out, which brought a cheer from the crew. We awaited his return, which, being too prolonged, another volunteer was sent out who found that our first man had fallen overboard and had swum around to the bow and was there almost overcome with the cold. He was soon brought back into the boat, given a rub-down and wrapped in blankets.

THE Captain's next orders were to rig a searchlight on the bow to send S. O. S. calls with, and we found it no easy task to stand on a small projection, on a cold December night, with the waves continually lapping us. And not a ship paid us any heed, though there were a number passing us. Finally one threw her light on us, but passed on. Then our clothes went for a bonfire, and I found myself minus most of mine in a short time, for the fire had to be kept going, to attract attention.

At last the cry went up: "We are sighted!" "They are headed this way!"

A grinding crash as our periscopes were mowed down, and water started running into the center control.

Our rescuers almost proved to be our undoing, however, as the captain of the crew who sighted us thought we were a launch on fire, and headed directly toward us, by so doing running his barge in tow right over our mid-section, which almost swamped us. It wouldn't have taken much to have sent us down, then, with our torpedo tubes open as they were.

AS they swept by us, the tug on one side and the barge on the other, our boys who were on the bow jumped to the barge and finding an ax, severed the tow line; the tug floated in one direction and the barge in another. The tug, which proved to be an oil tanker, put about and as soon as we could make the captain understand what had happened, he called back that he would stand by and take us off. Then the fun began, as everyone had to crawl through the torpedo tube which was twenty-one inches by seventeen feet long, made of brass, well polished and at an angle of thirty degrees. A half dozen times or so a fat man of the crew would get stuck, but we all finally got through and were taken off by the tug's crew who were standing by in lifeboats.

And how slowly the time had passed! It was then ten o'clock at night and we had been down twelve hours—the longest twelve hours of my life, which I would not want to go through again for any amount of money.

We were told that the destination of the captain of the tug was Brooklyn, N. Y., where he would land us, but first he must find his barge which had drifted away; after an hour's search it was located and taken in tow. There was no sleep for us, as our nerves were all on edge and at five o'clock, the next morning, we were landed at the Brooklyn Navy Yards, where we underwent a physical examination and when pronounced temporarily O. K., were allowed to go.

BUT what a plight we were in—some with money but no clothing, others with passable clothes but no money! After a consultation we divided equally and found we had enough to get home with.

As the train pulled into the Bridgeport station, we couldn't help but be thankful for our thousand-to-one chance, and we had even reached home before the news of the sinking of the sub had gotten around the city.

The lives of forty men almost snuffed out, and a two-million-dollar boat nearly lost—all through the carelessness of one workman failing to close a manhole cover after working in Number Five port main ballast-tank!

The Superintendent of the Ohio State Bureau of Criminal Identification tells of one of his most interesting cases.

By
C. A. Myers

The Poor-Box Thief

THE average citizen seems to be under the impression that fingerprint evidence appears only in detective fiction. This is not true. Fingerprint evidence is used every day, and dozens of prisoners serving in Ohio penal institutions were convicted on fingerprint evidence alone.

To mention fingerprints and a church in the same sentence may seem a bit anomalous, and when one finds a priest of a small-town church who is interested in fingerprints, the mystery deepens.

If Henry Martin, a church thief of some twenty-five years experience, had known that the Reverend Father in charge of a church in a small town in northern Ohio had formerly been a prison chaplain where he became familiar with fingerprints, Henry would not be doing chores for the Buckeye State today. But Martin seemed to be rather unsuccessful in his church depredations, as his twenty years of confinement in various institutions will attest.

Through some method known only to himself, this man learned of a little church in a small Ohio town where an image rested that attracted visitors from all parts of the State. He reasoned that the contribution-boxes in this church would be well supplied with coins, and he was not far off in his reasoning. He therefore decided to pay this church a visit, not to worship, as did the majority of visitors, but rather to purloin the contents of the contribution-boxes. One evening last winter he slipped in the church unobserved and tore from their fastenings the several contribution-boxes and carried them outside to force them open. After he had filled his pockets with coins from the boxes, he had what he thought was a bright idea.

"If," he said to himself, "this image in this church is so well known to visitors, perhaps the priest would pay a goodly sum to have it returned if it disappeared."

Thus was born the "bright idea." No sooner said than done and in a short time Martin had removed the image from the church and lugged it a little distance away where he secreted it under a building, as it was too heavy to carry very far.

This done, he journeyed to another town some ten or fifteen miles distant where he registered at a hotel under an assumed name. Having been assigned a room, he immediately got in touch with the priest by telephone. Here is where he used very poor judgment; but perhaps his years of confinement had impaired his mental faculties, or probably he thought the girl at the telephone exchange would not be so

impolite as to listen to his conversation. But she did listen, and acted in accordance with her best judgment.

WHEN Martin heard the voice of the priest on the other end of the wire, the humor of the situation appealed to him.

"Now, Father," he began, "you remember the image you had in your church, the one that attracted so many visitors there?"

"Why, yes," replied the priest, "it is still there."

"No, it isn't," the puzzled priest heard over the wire. "You just think it is, for I removed it only a short time ago, and I am the only one that knows where it is. For two hundred dollars you can have it back."

Then followed much discussion about terms and methods of payment, and finally it was agreed that Martin was to send a messenger to the priest with a letter stating where the image was to be found, and after it was located the priest was to give the messenger two hundred dollars. Martin was willing to accept the good Father's word that he would not report the matter to the authorities.

Everything seemed to be progressing nicely, only the curious telephone girl was not being given the consideration due her. After hearing this conversation, she immediately notified the sheriff, and when Martin returned to the hotel after dispatching his messenger, he found this minion of the law awaiting him ready to furnish him with room and board at the expense of the county.

The sheriff then telephoned to the priest and told him to accept the letter from the messenger when he arrived but not to give him any money. The Reverend Father protested that he had given his word not to notify the authorities, and the sheriff assured him that it would not be necessary for him to break his word, for Martin was already in custody on a charge of blackmail.

Next morning the priest viewed the damage done by Martin in removing the contribution-boxes from their fastenings and it occurred to him that although there seemed to be sufficient evidence to convict Martin of blackmail, there did not seem to be any direct evidence of his guilt of the burglary of the boxes. He then thought of possible fingerprints. Loading the boxes in his machine, he drove to Columbus, where he delivered the boxes to this office and astonished me by his knowledge of fingerprints. He had been very careful in handling the boxes, and I knew that he had not disturbed any latent prints if Martin had left any. These boxes were painted white and seemed to be made of a heavy steel with a highly polished brass band around the end. I know of no better surface to reveal latent prints than a highly polished piece of brass, so I immediately examined every inch of brass on the boxes, but did not find a single latent print.

"Perhaps," suggested the priest, "the thief used gloves, which he probably would unless he was an amateur; or isn't it possible he might have used a cloth in obliterating the prints after he handled the boxes?"

An examination of the brass again under a powerful magnifying glass convinced us that it had recently been rubbed with a cloth, for a slight accumulation of dust had been disturbed and long streaks were plainly visible such as could only have been made with a cloth and not with gloved hands as they would leave separate smudges. I questioned the priest about the method used in cleaning this brass part, and he said a liquid polish was used, and when it was polished, no streaks were left. We now felt sure that the thief had not worn gloves, and I felt sure that somewhere on the surface of these boxes there would be a latent print that he had missed in his cleaning process; but it would require some little time to examine each box thoroughly, and so I told the priest I would make a thorough search for prints and would advise him the result of my efforts and I asked him to tell the sheriff to forward Martin's fingerprints immediately.

AFTER the priest had gone, I went over every inch of the surface of the boxes, and on the third one I examined I found a latent print of a finger that was almost as plain as one made with ink. The print was a pattern known as an "accidental," which is very easy for comparison, and I felt quite elated. In order to make sure that this print belonged to the thief, I telephoned the sheriff and told him of my discovery, asking him to have the priest also forward the prints of the janitor or any other person handling these boxes in order that I might eliminate their prints from any found on the boxes. Next morning's mail brought Martin's prints, accompanied by those of the janitor, and in order

that there might not be any doubt, the priest had sent his own fingerprints. Examination of the prints under a glass revealed that Martin was the only person having an "accidental" print, so there was no doubt in my mind as to his guilt.

IN the meantime Martin contended that he had not rifled the contribution-boxes, stating that this had been done by another man with him. He described this man, who no doubt was a product of his imagination. He expressed his willingness to plead guilty to a charge of blackmail, as this charge was punishable by a maximum sentence of five years, while burglary carried a maximum sentence of fifteen years. The authorities refused to bargain with him, telling him that the collection of coins found in his possession, although they could not be identified, were pretty good evidence that he had rifled the boxes. He replied to this by stating that he had won these coins in a dice game a few days before. His confidence, however, was soon to be shaken for he did not know of the fingerprint found on the box he had handled and he probably thought he had removed all traces of his prints.

After identifying his print as being identical with the one found on the box, I turned to the files of our office, where several hundred thousand fingerprints of criminals are on file. Imagine my surprise at finding Martin listed in these files as having been taken in custody at Toledo a few months before for "rifling the 'Poor Boxes' of a church," and in addition to this recent arrest a criminal record dating back to 1901 was recorded against him, the majority of his convictions being for similar crimes.

Believing that the State of Ohio could be saved the expense of a trial, I journeyed to the county jail where Martin was confined to confront him with the evidence against him. The priest and the sheriff were present at this interview, and when they told Martin that I was from the State Bureau of Criminal Identification and Investigation, he laughed and said he did not see what interest I could have in his case. I told him that I was interested in any case where fingerprints were involved, and he said that still he did not see why I was interested in his case. I told him that I had his complete criminal record and read it to him, emphasizing the number of times he had been arrested for robbing churches. He still contended that this did not prove that he had robbed the contribution-boxes in the church. I asked him if he understood how criminals were often convicted by leaving fingerprints on articles they handled while committing a crime.

"Yes," he answered, "but if I was going to commit a burglary I would take precautions to make sure that no fingerprints were left."

"That is exactly what you tried to do this time," I told him, "but you were a little careless, for when you grasped one of these boxes with your left hand while you cleaned the brass with a cloth in your right hand, you did not remove the prints made by your left hand."

He was visibly impressed but was still unwilling to admit the rifling of the boxes.

"Would you be interested in seeing the print you left on one of these boxes?" I asked him.

"I did not leave any prints on a box," he replied, "but I am a little curious to see the print that you think belongs to me."

I showed him the photograph of his print taken from the box and pointed out to him some twelve points of comparison between that print and the one on his fingerprint card.

"Now," I asked him, "would you rather plead guilty to burglary and ask for the leniency of the court or would you rather stand trial and have your criminal record introduced in court together with this infallible fingerprint evidence? What do you suppose the jury will do when I show them this print and explain to them that, with the possible exception of one chance out of one hundred and sixty-four million, this print was left on this rifled box by you?"

"You win," he said; "but I sure thought I cleaned all those prints off the boxes. I'll plead guilty to this charge and if you will recommend leniency for me I will give you the names of the other men who have been robbing churches in this state for the past year, and sometimes burning them."

HE did plead guilty, and was given a substantial sentence at the Ohio Penitentiary. Through information furnished by him four other men are in jail waiting trial for many other similar crimes; and, to quote the good priest, "now that the rat has turned ferret," we hope to get a conviction in all cases, for we have other fingerprint evidence taken from other church robberies.

My Tiger Hunt

By

M. L. Fox

A cougar hunt in which wild hogs took a prominent part is here vividly described.

DON EDMUNDO CASTRO grows coffee and horses and cattle on his plantation in Costa Rica, the little Central American republic which lies just north of Panama. I was his guest in the month of March; and Don Edmundo, unlike most Latin-American gentlemen, loves to hunt the big game with which the Costa Rican highland abounds. My ambition was to get a tiger, *"el tigre,"* he is called in the Spanish tongue; but he is in reality the panther or mountain lion, grown a bit bigger in the tropics than he is found in the Rocky Mountains.

"We will go out today," said Don Edmundo, "and maybe you will get a tiger. I want to shoot a wild hog; the peons need meat. We will ride to the favorite watering-place of the hogs when they come down from the mountains. The tiger's favorite food is the wild hog."

Don Edmundo warned me not to underestimate the danger when hunting wild hogs. They go in droves of some hundreds, and when enraged will attack and tear to pieces any man or beast they can reach.

We left our horses with three peons, about half a mile from the watering place, and proceeded on foot. "Man and the tiger hunt the wild hog in the same way," said Don Edmundo. "We will get to a place near the path which the hogs have made and where we can find a tree that can be climbed easily. We will watch in the branches until a herd of the hogs come by on their way to water. They go in single file. We will shoot the last one, for those ahead will not turn back.

"The tiger hunts hogs in the same way," Don Edmundo went on. "He finds the trunk of a stooping tree. He is too heavy to climb a straight tree easily. Gets out on a big limb that is over the path the hogs are following, and springs down on the last hog. It is a case of devil take the hindmost. Both tiger and man have learned to be wary of wild hogs."

We made our way carefully to the hog-path. It was not difficult to find a tree with huge, spreading branches into which we swung ourselves with our 30-30's. Each took a position where he could see the hog-path clearly. Don Edmundo cautioned me against making any noise.

Soon troops of monkeys were swinging in the near-by trees and chattering; not far away *congos* or roaring monkeys began to emit the most hideous sounds that ever came from a body so small. Not far away there was a harsh cry of a bird, the name of which translated from sonorous Spanish means "the bird that betrayed Christ."

DON EDMUNDO reached over and softly touched my arm and pointed up the path and to one side. I soon detected a tawny figure, huge, and moving with the caution of a cat stalking its prey, toward a tree the trunk of which was leaning over the hog-path. I could only catch a glimpse of the tiger, now and then, as it moved through the bushes. It leaped, rather than climbed, into the lower branches of the tree not more than fifty feet from where Don Edmundo and I were sitting. We saw one of the limbs shake a bit, and the monkeys set up a violent chatter. The bird flew away, squawking raucously. The limb trembled now and then as the great cat crept to its vantage-point over the hog-path. Then all was still. We could not see the tiger, but we knew it was there.

The waiting was not long, but it seemed an age. At last we heard a grunting in the distance. The hogs were coming in single file—*carablancos,* they are called in the Spanish language because they have white faces. The *carablancos* are the biggest of all the wild hogs of Costa Rica and the most ferocious, but their meat is the most highly prized by the natives.

Soon they were passing, those wild hogs, in what seemed to be an endless procession. We were watching the path under the tiger. I watched for the tiger's spring upon the last hog. Then I hoped to put a soft-point bullet through the tiger's head or just back of his foreleg.

Suddenly, almost noiselessly, the tiger sprang. There was a loud squealing. Then hell broke loose. The tiger had made a mistake. The hog upon which he leaped was not the last of the hogs; but merely the last of the first division. A whole herd of hogs came charging out of the bushes giving their war-cry as they came. Those that had passed came back with a rush, champing and gnashing their teeth. In a moment the tiger was cut off from escape into the woods, but he was able to spring upon the fallen trunk of a big tree, snarling, and striking at the hogs with his big paws as he sprang.

Within a few moments there were hundreds of hogs trying to get at that puma, those last to reach the scene of action actually scrambling over the backs of those in front. They jumped at the tiger, fully five feet above them. The tiger whirled from side to side of the tree and struck at the hogs with lightninglike blows of his paws, and woe to the big boar, leaping higher than the others, that came within reach!

Furiously the battle raged, the hogs jumping to get at the big cat, and the cat striking swiftly with crushing blows.

The battle could not last. Time was not called for an instant. Plainly the tiger was weary. His movements were not so fast, though his snarling was quite as savage. There was no let-up in the lunging of the hogs toward the top of the log. When the tiger struck at a foe on one side of the log, he did not whirl so quickly now to the foe on the other side, nor was he so wary.

Reaching down with his paw to hit a head on the side of the log opposite to where we were, we saw the tiger's long tail drop down on the side of the log next to us; and a big boar, leaping from his vantage-point on the carcass of one of his fallen comrades, caught that tail in his teeth, and as he fell back the tiger came with him.

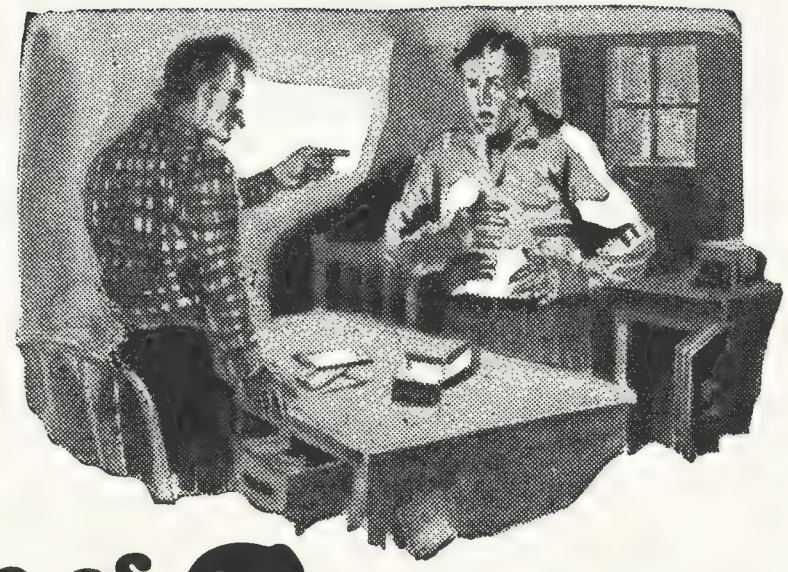
We saw the tiger leap above the backs of the hogs probably a half-dozen times, striking with his claws and tearing with his teeth. Then the hogs heaved over him and they crowded about him, jumping over each other in a mad scramble. Then they quieted down to grunting and tearing and chewing. We watched for a long time, shifting our positions in the tree from one hard seat to another that soon became hard; but we dared not come down.

BY and by the hogs at the outer edges of the herd began to move off in single file toward the water. When all were gone and there was no sound of others coming, Señor Castro and I climbed down from the branches in which we had been sitting for more than three hours and went to the scene of the conflict. There we counted seventeen hogs that had been killed by the tiger or were so badly hurt that the Don's hunting-knife finished them. Of the tiger nothing was left except bones and tufts of yellow hair.

Don Edmundo went to where he could call the waiting peons; two of them came with the horses, and one went, as directed, back to the plantation where all of the other peons were summoned. Word was sent to a near-by village, with the result that the people of the plantation and of the village had pork in such quantities as they never had had before.

Thus ended my first and last tiger hunt in Central America.

BUSINESS life has its all-too-dramatic moments—as witness this remarkable real experience of an office employee in the South.



The Price of Suspicion

By

J. H. Overstreet

THOUGH I was raised far out in the backwoods, I had, by home study, secured a very good business education. My first clerical position was clerk in the commissary of the Nathan Turpentine Company, where I studied diligently to learn every angle of the turpentine business.

Gradually Mr. Nathan, the general manager, who also owned an interest in several other companies, left the business more and more to my supervision.

At the end of the third year he came to me and said: "Wane, I cannot be here very much this year. I want you to take charge of the business and run it just as if every dollar in it was yours."

To say that I was elated, would not do my feelings justice, for I was exceedingly glad of the success I had attained in so short a time.

Only one little feeling of apprehension did I have, for the promotion placed me in a position above two men who had been with the company longer than I had, and I did not know how they would feel about it.

During the winter and early spring, we raised the second year "tins," put up the "virgin," "cropped off" the cups into "rides," and assigned laborers to the respective "crops." Every part of the work moved as smoothly as if it had been done by clockwork.

Both of the men over whom I had been promoted were, so far as I could see, absolutely loyal to me. One of them, a Mr. Rogers, seemed especially glad I had received the promotion. I know he was my right-hand man at all times, and if I showed any preference to either man it was he that received it.

About six months after my promotion, Mr. Hutchenson, of the Nioma Lumber Company, came to pay a note the lumber company had given for the sawmill rights to the timber we were "working." In payment of the note, he gave me three checks on different banks and five hundred dollars in cash, the total being twenty-seven thousand, two hundred and fifty dollars.

As it was late in the afternoon and fifteen miles to the nearest bank, I placed the checks and the cash in a large safe, intending to send the checks to the bank next day and retain the cash for the Saturday pay-day.

Imagine my surprise when I opened the safe next morning and found the five hundred gone. The office door was securely locked as I came in; the safe was exactly as I left it the night before; not a thing had been molested in any way, except the cash. Even the checks were lying exactly as I left them.

I looked frantically at every window, examined the door-lock, tried to find some sign on the safe combination, and hunted for tracks everywhere. Not even a scratch could I find. The cash seemed to have flown away.

No one, so far as I knew, understood the safe combination, except myself and Mr. Nathan, and I was the only person who carried a key to the office. It was a puzzle that bewildered me.

I telephoned Mr. Nathan, and he came, arriving at noon. After I told him all I knew, we again examined everything very carefully. Finding no clue whatever, he faced me abruptly. "Wane," he stormed angrily, "you've got that money!"

FOR a moment I could not speak. I had not even thought of being accused of taking the money. I realized, too, that the evidence was against me. I am sure my face went white, a fact which Mr. Nathan misconstrued as a sign of guilt. Regaining my speech, I asked with a trembling voice:

"You—you certainly do not believe that *I* took the money, do you?"

"No one else could have taken it without leaving any sign," he shot back at me hotly.

I saw my predicament and I stood for an instant perplexed, my heart making tremendous thumps against my side. At last I pleaded: "Mr. Nathan, please do not think I know a bit more about that money than you do. Give me time and I'll find what became of it."

"You can have all the time you want, but it will be at your own expense. I do not need you any longer," he exploded, pointing toward the door.

Never before had a Wane been accused of stealing, and my anger rose to a high pitch.

I made one step toward him—then caught myself, and walked away.

My first inclination was to put as much distance as possible between myself and the plantation, but on second thought I felt that would be a sure sign of guilt. I also felt sure I would be arrested, so I determined to stay near by, and await developments.

Not far away were two other turpentine works to which I went and applied for a position.

Though the managers of both these firms had previously offered me work, they refused to hire me after hearing my reasons for leaving my former position. They too thought I was guilty!

I determined then to return to the place I had left and get work, any kind, until I could clear my name of the accusation. When I arrived, I found Rogers had been promoted to my former position and another man put in his place.

I asked Rogers for work. He replied, with downcast eyes:

"I haven't any kind of work to give you except chipping. You wouldn't do that, would you?"

"I'll do anything," I told him, "until I can clear my name."

So I began work as a common laborer on the plantation where I had formerly held the position as superintendent. Rogers treated me as well as anyone on the place, though he often advised me to go away and get a better job. But I could not go; my name must be cleared.

During the following months, I suffered the very torments of hell. I moved my wife and little son from the superintendent's house to a laborer's shack. I saw my wife and son ostracized as rogues. My former friends shunned me, and every time I passed anyone I felt the finger of scorn pointed at me. Several times I heard the remark: "Come from nothing—go to nothing."

THOSE words made my blood fairly boil. My parents, though poor, were as honest and trustworthy as anyone that lived. It was hard to bear, but I stuck to my task.

Night after night, I lay awake trying to solve the mystery, but no way could I think how the money got away.

Oftentimes, after everyone else was asleep, I went over to the store and sat there for hours, thinking I might find a solution. The more I tried to unravel the mystery, the more puzzled I became. At times I even thought I was crazy, and then I thought I must have removed the money while asleep. I hunted for it everywhere, but no trace of it could I find.

At last, in despair, I promised my wife to take her away from that place in a few weeks if I did not find anything which I thought would aid me in clearing my name.

At midnight, a few days later, some one knocked on my door. "Who's that?" I asked at once, for I had not slept.

"It's me, Misser Oscar," came a negro's voice. "Misser Rogers is mighty sick and wants you to come quick."

I knew Rogers had been sick for several days, but did not know he was seriously ill. I went at once and found Mr. Nathan there also. Immediately after I entered the room Rogers called:

"Oscar!"

I went to the bed and sat beside him. "What is it, George?" I asked.

"Oscar," he gasped, "I want you to forgive me for all the trouble I've caused you."

"You've never caused me any trouble that I know of," I answered truthfully.

He drew a long breath and lay so still I thought he had passed away. Presently he turned his face toward me and gazed steadfastly into my eyes. It seemed as if death was hovering over him, but at last he said slowly: "Oscar, you have always had perfect confidence in me, haven't you?"

"I have," I assured him quickly.

"That—that confidence has—been misplaced. And oh, how I have suffered!" he stammered.

I WAS surprised. "How?" was all I could ask.

"Will you—forgive me? Oh! Do, Oscar, please do!"

"Sure I will, George. Tell me what you think you've done," I replied, laying my hand on his forehead.

"I—I—" he began and then turned his head away muttering something I did not understand.

"Tell me, George; it's all right," I whispered, as I leaned over him.

"I—I— How can I tell you? You *will* forgive me, wont you?"

"Yes. Anything! Tell me!" I promised earnestly.

"I took that money," he flashed, spitting out the words as if they were poison.

"What money?" I questioned quickly. I had, in my anxiety, forgotten the missing money.

"That from the company's safe a year ago," he answered, his voice slowly gaining strength.

THE revelation stunned me and I could not speak. Mr. Nathan, who had been silent, leaned toward him anxiously and inquired:

"Do you mean to say, Rogers, that you took the money of which Mr. Wane has been accused and which has caused him so much suffering?"

"Ye—yes, I did it," he answered, but he kept his eyes firmly fixed on my face. "It's on the sill of the commissary in a box. I never used a cent of it."

The confession seemed to strengthen him, and his voice grew stronger, but neither Mr. Nathan nor I could speak. We sat gazing at each other.

The silence was disturbing, but finally Rogers reached his hand toward me. I took it. "Tell me again, Oscar, that you forgive me," he pleaded, grasping my hand more firmly.

"I will," I answered as cheerfully as I could. "But I want to know how you got it without leaving any sign."

"That was easy," he replied. "You remember the day the mule got into the yellow-jackets' nest?"

"Yes."

"When you and Mr. Nathan ran out, you left the instructions for opening the safe on the desk. I copied them."

"But how did you get into the office without a key?" I questioned.

"I had been watching my chance to discredit you with Mr. Nathan and when you put that money in the safe I thought it was my time. If you remember, you came out of the office ahead of me and I pulled the door shut—but I failed to pull it far enough for that lock-bolt to catch."

All that was very clear to me, now, but I did not yet know why he wanted to discredit me, so I asked him.

"Because you had been promoted over me," he answered candidly.

We were silent for some time. At length I felt Rogers' grasp on my hand tighten. I looked at him quickly and he begged again:

"Oscar, will you forgive me, now? If you will I believe I shall get well, and if I do I want to work with you."

I could not refuse him. And I have never regretted it an instant, for he recovered and again we worked together, as we had done before the theft.

The Tale of a Monkey

By
Lloyd Logan

Wherein a lady becomes the custodian of a troublesome pet—and the laughs are all yours.

IN the first place, I never cared for a monkey. I would never voluntarily own a monkey. If I aspired to a pet at all, it would be something beautiful or ornamental, like a flamboyant macaw, for instance. However, it occurred! A monkey fell into my hands, whether or no—or at least, the care of it. My brother always assured me on the advent of each new pet:

"Now, this one will not be a particle of trouble to you. I'll take all the care of it."

To be perfectly just, he really thought that he was speaking the absolute truth, so enamored would he be with the new pet. And he would keep his word—vigorously, indulgently, for about one week. Then his attentions would begin to flag, diminishing gradually, until they altogether languished.

The monkey arrived at a most inauspicious moment. My brother brought it in a basket about nine o'clock in the evening. It had a soft rope tied around its body, to which was attached a light but strong chain.

"Isn't it cunning? It is only about six months old. It is just off one of the fruit-schooners from Honduras. It was the mascot."

He ventured this information without a qualm of misgiving. The little creature shivered with fright amid such strange scenes, and cuddled up close to him.

"It is cunning," I admitted reluctantly, but on my guard. I was quite determined now, as I had been previously, that *I* would not take care of another pet. "Just where do you intend to keep it? The chicken-coop is the only available spot, and that is housing the crate of turkeys."

"Well, why not put it in with the turkeys?" He spoke with a forced brightness of manner, as if he was promoting a wonderful idea.

Because it was actually the only usable spot, suitable or otherwise, we arranged, temporarily for the night, a box in one corner in which it could sleep.

All through the night, my wakeful hours passed slowly, so perturbed I was. First my sympathy prompted, "Poor little thing!" Then again I pictured turkeys strewn about in various dying conditions.

With the light of dawn I fled to the chicken-coop. To my amazement I found that the monkey had slept serenely in the box, and the turkeys placidly on the roost. Placing the food within reach, they ate out of the same pan with complete harmony.

The monkey was really a most engaging creature, as I learned. The knowledge was acquired personally, when the days passed into weeks, the weeks into months, and its care became, as usual, my increasing responsibility; soon I was its sole caretaker.

I TIED it up in a small orange tree in my back yard, where it played among the branches with great joy. To be sure, little by little, it pulled the bark off the tree, and chewed the young sprouts bit by bit, until the life of the tree departed and only the bare branches and trunk remained. I left it standing, however, for the monkey's delectation.

It was amusing to hand the monkey a cup of warm milk on a cold morning and watch it hold the cup in one paw, while dipping a piece of bread in it with the other. I would toss it a soft rubber ball, which it would toss back. It learned to catch anything I would throw, instinctively knowing that it would mean something to eat or a frolic.

If the monkey was loyal to its friends, it was also consistent in never forgetting an enemy. Of course it attracted a lot of notice among the boys in the neighborhood. Sometimes there would be a row of boys perched on the high board back fence watching it, like birds on a telephone wire. I completely gave up trying to preserve the privacy of my back yard. There was only one way—to remove the monkey; and the monkey did not belong to me.

The monkey enjoyed the boys hugely, and cut all sorts of capers for their delight and appreciative applause. There was always a generous reward. Many a nickel was squandered on some little delicacy for the monkey. They would put peanuts in their pockets. The monkey, learning this, would dive his hand down far as he could reach and bring them out.

On one occasion a boy tossed the monkey an open penknife, which it caught with confidence. Naturally the knife cut its paws. While they were not seriously injured, they were hurt, and thereafter whenever that boy came in the yard, the monkey would begin an excited chattering and crying; nor would it cease until the boy left the yard.

The other boys poked so much fun at him that he could not be persuaded to return. As the fascination of the monkey continued with the other children, it came about that that boy was ostracized, so far as their affiliation with the monkey was concerned.

Now the enjoyment of humor always depends on whether you are on the stage or in the audience. This incident of the monkey I relate with deepest humiliation; yet it elicits peals of laughter from any group of people.

There was no alley separating our grounds from those facing the other street—simply a high board fence. I merely mention in passing that I am inclined to be tall, naturally dignified. My abundant hair rather lends a distingué effect to the *tout ensemble*, and I always have had considerable regard for my appearance in public.

The phone rang, shortly after lunch, as I remember. I had slipped on my kimono to lounge for a while, wound my hair tightly at the back of my head to be cool, even dampened the brush to slick it up. The effect was a so-called knot, not a coiffure; there is a difference. I presume, to be more accurate, it was an old-fashioned psyche projecting straight out from the back of my head. Because of the prevailing mode of bobbed hair this was the more conspicuous.

Fortunately no device has as yet been invented that people at the other end of the line can *see* over the phone. With great composure, I answered. I was greeted by an excited voice:

"Hurry! Hurry! Your monkey is loose and is running away. It has just jumped the back fence."

"Thank you," I replied. "Which way has it started?"

"I can see from my window that it is on the way to the new house."

THERE was no time for further civilities. Nothing but action counts when a monkey is running away. Gathering my kimono closely around me, I fled in pursuit to the back yard, hesitated but a moment looking for an easy place, then climbed that back fence as if it had been an ordinary pastime, instead of a feat fraught with imminent danger.

My neighbor's yard is a continuous lawn to her front sidewalk. Some men on the other side of the street deliberately stopped,

and frankly watched the maneuver. To this day I do not know whether they were held spellbound by admiration or curiosity; I do hope, though, that they felt repaid.

The new house was farther down on the same square. Dominated by the one thought of recapturing the monkey, I hurried madly on, regardless of appearances. On my way out, I had thoughtfully grabbed an apple as I passed the sideboard, with which to lure, if possible, the erstwhile runaway.

Reaching the objective point, the new house, I found the monkey. It had climbed up to the second story, and as usual a crowd had gathered and continued to gather. The carpenters had stopped work. The monkey was the center of attraction. It seemed bewildered with the unfamiliar environment, rather frightened.

A very nicely dressed young man was standing watching it. He must have been a chance passer-by. I did not recognize him as belonging to the neighborhood. I tried with such poise as I could summon to eliminate the crowd from my mind. I called reassuringly, to the monkey:

"Come, don't you want some apple?"

I used my most persuasive tone, though longing ardently to wring its neck.

But nothing is accomplished except with kindness. The monkey knew my voice instantly. It was frankly so delighted to see me that it swung back and forth by its tail on a near-by beam, and held out its hands for the apple.

As it had been taught to catch, I did not know whether it would come down or not if I disappointed it. While I was loath to introduce still another act, I thought, all things considered, it was best. So I threw up the apple. The monkey caught it deftly, amid the hilarious cheers of the crowd. "Come, come!" I called sweetly.

AND it came! Nor did it stand on the order of its coming, but came at once. Descending in leaps and bounds, it alighted squarely on the shoulder of the young man standing by me, and affectionately, dexterously, with supreme confidence, wound its tail around his neck, better to secure its position on his shoulder.

Now, we are all human. I firmly state that not one in a thousand would relish having an unknown monkey, no matter how friendly disposed, suddenly to alight upon him and tightly curl its tail around his neck.

HIS face was scarlet from embarrassment, but the monkey, with the assurance of one who is always loved, rebuffs not being listed in its experience, was unaware that it was an unwelcome guest. It thrust its hand deep in the man's coat pocket and pulled out a pencil. Holding it up, it regarded it quizzically from every angle, smelled it cautiously, put its teeth to it, then instantly held it at arm's length. It was a queer object, surely nothing to eat! Pockets held very strange things!

The crowd was elated.

Now, this young man was a gentleman; bravely he accepted the rôle fate had given him, and did it well. He had not intended to be brave and gallant at all. It was greatness thrust upon him. He did it with the heroism of a stoic.

In all my experience it so happened I had never touched the monkey. I had never intended to. I just couldn't. But here I was, imposing my obligations on a perfectly unknown stranger.

"The monkey wont hurt you," I assured him. "Really it wont. I live just a house or two up the street. As long as the monkey is already on your shoulder, would you mind, or could you just walk home with me?"

I had never before, perish the thought, never, asked a man to walk home with me, to say nothing of my being garbed in a kimono and he adorned with a live monkey. But chivalry still remains embedded in the masculine heart.

"Sure, if I can help you," he replied, with a not unsuccessful effort at pleasantness.

I gathered my kimono tightly and securely; we moved off. The crowd followed. They were not at a distance, but at our heels. With all the poise I possessed, composure and dignity, not forgetting the kimono and lack of coiffure, we headed the procession, my active mind trying to devise some avenue of escape.

From memory's reserve came this hitherto inconspicuous fact: the children of the family in making their daily calls upon the neighborhood children took a shortcut through one of the back fences, where two boards were off. I have never presumed upon my neighbors, nor been a back-door or borrowing acquaintance, but I felt justified now in boldly encroaching.

"I know where there is a hole in the fence," I confided to my companion. "If you don't mind, I think we can save time and avoid a number of these people."

HE acquiesced. There was none of the conquering hero in my manner. I retained the indelible impression of my childhood—a lady was always a lady. But just try yourself for "charming grace," under those circumstances!

As we passed by the house on our way to the place of the missing boards, the family in that house were at lunch; perceiving the crowd, they gathered at the window in evident trepidation. Was the house on fire, or what? I bowed serenely, but did not stop to explain.

The most of our followers not being on intimate terms with this neighbor, possibly not even acquainted, the crowd noticeably dwindled as we found the haven of refuge, the high board fence with the welcome passage-way. We crept through. We emerged.

Hannah, who also attends to my laundry, was washing under a tree. She is a big black woman, and had a white cloth wound turban-fashion around her head. She was singing at the top of her voice, "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," keeping time as her arms rhythmically rubbed up and down the board. She stopped suddenly. Flinging off the suds from her arms with her hands, she placed her arms akimbo. Her eyes almost popped out of her head. Her mouth fell open.

"Fo' de Lawd's sake, young miss, whar' you-all come from, an' gwine to?"

Then "sensing" the situation, she swayed back and forth with genuine, unrestrained mirth. She chuckled, laughed, whooped; occasionally interspersed with the ejaculation, "Lawsee me!"

I was never again able seriously to give Hannah an order.

Though our retinue had for the most part dispersed, still there were stragglers who faithfully clung to us, determined to see it through to the end. Thus Indian file we walked on toward my home. Occasionally some one would hail a boon companion who had not been on the other street: "Come on, lookee!"

While trying to be oblivious to all of this with elegant unconcern, I was aware that my companion cast an eye in my direction. If there was a twinkle lurking in the corner, far be it from him to give it expression.

We reached our destination without further adventure. I closed the artistic gate in my attractive lattice-work, which was supposed to conceal the utilities of life from the gaze of the public, with a most decisive click.

We walked around to the old orange tree, and I securely tied the recent wandering monkey. But how could I thank this courteous and obliging young man?

Taking the straight line of truth as the most direct route to the desired point, I smiled, saying sincerely from my heart:

"I do not know how to thank you. You have placed me in your debt for a favor I can scarcely hope to repay." I hesitated slightly for a possible suggestion.

IT came with alacrity. Putting his hand in his pocket, he drew out his card, tipped his hat and bowed as he handed it to me. "Jack Benton, Meat Market and Green Groceries," it read.

"I am just starting up," he said with perfect formal business politeness. "I would appreciate your patronage."

Needless to record, of course, he received it abundantly. If he had been a stranger in the community, he was no longer one now. I had introduced him.

The monkey? Eventually it was given away and passed out of my possession—but not out of my remembrance.

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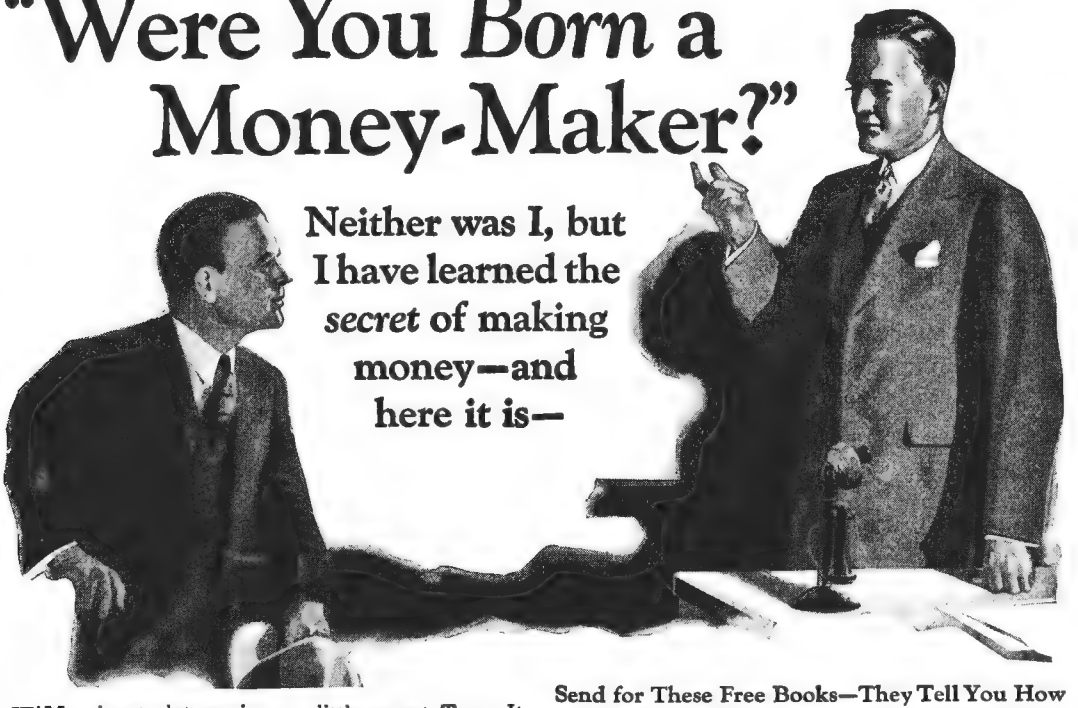

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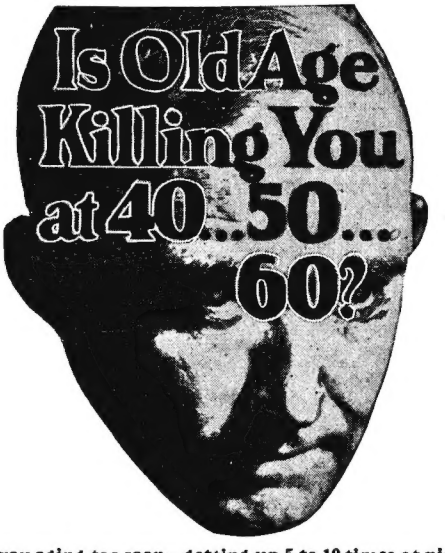

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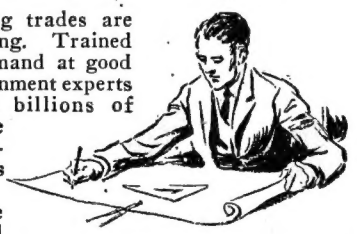

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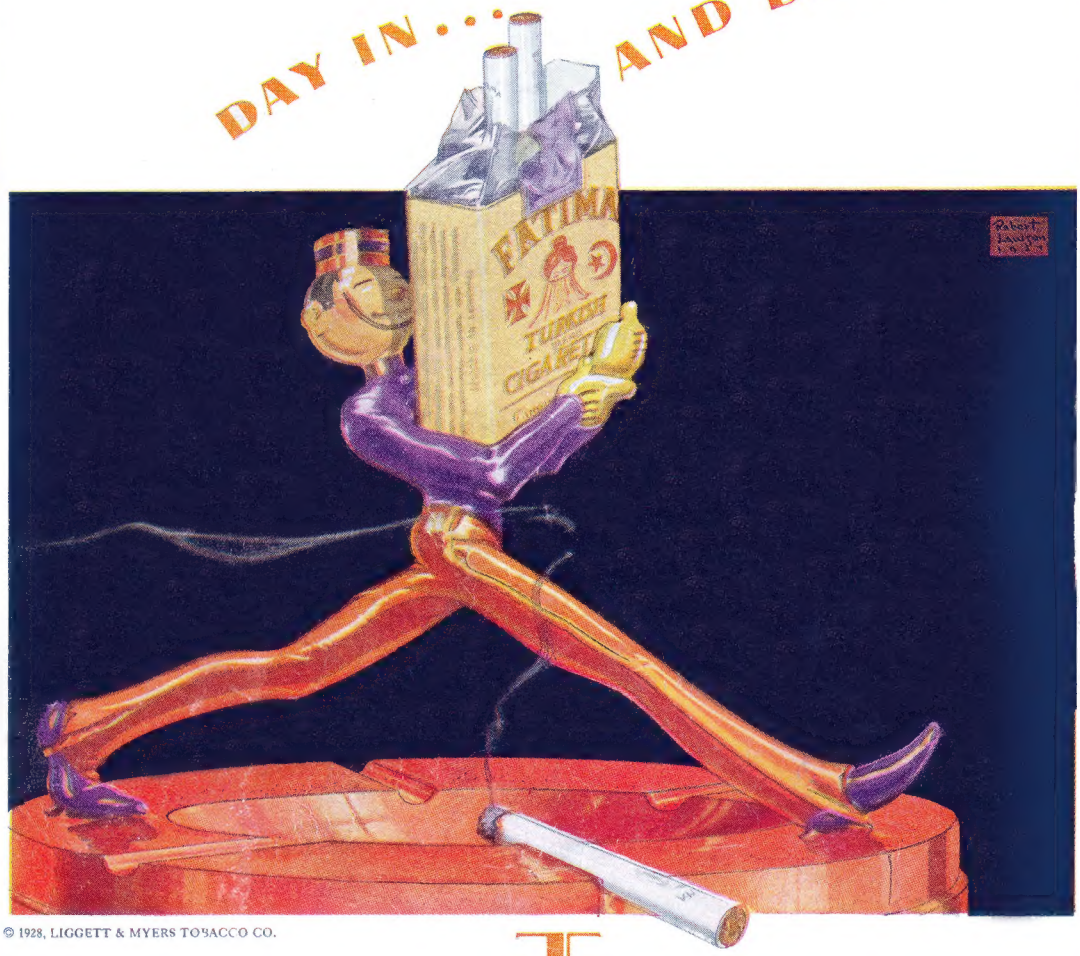

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